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2015: The Year in Beer



Photo credit: Daniel Drennon

The craft beer scene in Los Angeles and Orange County continued to explode in 2015. More breweries. More beer bars. More bottle shops. No end in sight.

Needless to say, this is all good news for the growing legions of craft beer fans. Chances are, you now have a neighborhood brewery providing fresh beer in small batches. And that, my friends, is why craft beer, not just in LA, but across America continues to kick macro-beer's collective ass. Market share is up to 11% and the bad boys of bad beers have developed a noticeable nervousness - from the irksome Super Bowl ad to the rash of, "if you can't make better beer than them, buy them" purchases of craft breweries.

The year in beer here in LA saw the Arts District downtown blowing up with breweries starting with the excellent Mumford Brewing to be soon followed by Arts District, Boomtown, and Iron Triangle.

Vanguard brewery Strand moved from their original location to a 36,000 square foot brewery. El Segundo Brewing thankfully turned their worst in town tasting room into an office (which is what it should have been all along) and opened what is now one of the nicest tap rooms in all of LA. ESBC's hopcentric line up continues to emerge as one of the best in the region. They even did a "Broken Skull IPA" collaboration with Stone Cold Steve Austin. Only in LA, right?

To put it all in perspective and provide you a summary of what happened in 2015 and what to expect in 2016, we reached out to John Verive, freelance beer writer for the Los Angeles Times, Paste Magazine, Beer of Tomorrow, and our own Beer Paper LA. See his cover story on page 10.

Cheers to beer and a Happy New Year!
- Daniel Drennon

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2015 BEST



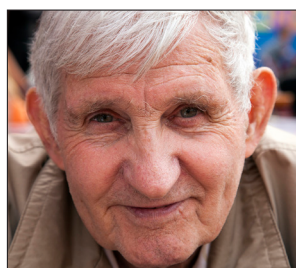
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BEER RUNS DEEPER THAN BLOOD

FUNNY HOW BROTHERS SETTLE THINGS...
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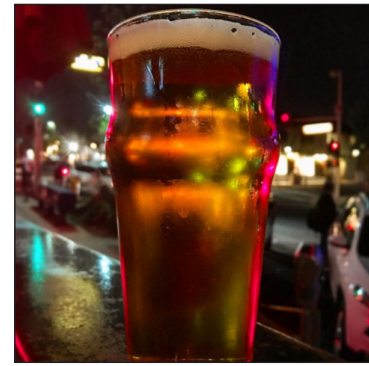
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IN THE NEWS

BALLAST POINT GOES FOR A BILLION

By Daniel Drennon

Twenty-three years ago, Jack White, a recent UCLA grad, opened Home Brew Mart in San Diego. This humble home brew supply shop fostered Ballast Point Brewing. Over the past twenty years, Ballast Point has been one of California's highest visibility, highest quality craft breweries, making world class beers like Sculpin, Victory at Sea, Sea Monster Stout and now Grunion. Their motto is "Dedicated to the Craft." In a 2015 that saw multiple craft breweries sell to macros, the acquisition of mighty Ballast Point by Constellation Brands was the biggest bombshell of all...and accordingly, the hardest to swallow.



Image courtesy of Ballast Point

Constellation owns Corona, Modelo, and Pacifico as well as a boatload of big-name wineries. This sale begs the questions we apparently all should be getting used to, which is whether Ballast Point and others who sell to macros are still craft? Will the quality of the beer actually change? Is that even the point, or shall we say is that even the Ballast Point that we have known and loved?

It is an emotional debate for craft beer lovers...for craft beer purists who love the artistry of the small brewery. Can you maintain that artistry at 200,000 barrels and more? One friend pointed out that while small craft beer bars may no longer choose to carry Ballast Point because of its availability everywhere else (and perhaps, more importantly, because they are all about supporting the small, local breweries), we may now presume that we will be able to get Grunion and Sculpin on planes, at airports, in hotels, and in sports stadiums. Does that make it a win for craft fans, or still an emotional loss?

Because it is such a hotly debated topic, I reached out to "beer people" in LA to ask for comments.

After almost twenty years of hard work, paving the way for many many breweries, we shouldn't be giving them shit for "selling out"... but rather congratulating them for their success!
Martin Svab, Co-founder of Phantom Carriage

Making craft beer has always been a business; because of the industry's recent growth, it has become recognized by financial groups and allied trade industries as a profitable one. My hope for any new ownership structures of a brewery is to maintain the quality of the beer, the integrity of the brand, and to continue with the same passion for the community and culture that has blossomed to support it.
Cyrena Nouzille, Founder/Owner
Ladyface Ale Companie

*I think Dylan said it best:
The line is drawn, the curse is cast. The slow one now will later be fast As the present now, will later be past. The order is rapidly fadin' And the first one now will later be last, for the times they are a-changin'*
Jeremy Raub, Founder/Owner
Eagle Rock Brewery

Congrats to the Ballast Point Crew—it'll be nice to get a hoppy beer in Mexico.
Owen Williams, Ritual Brewing Co.

Good luck going forward! Still one of our all-time favorite San Diego breweries!
Artifex Brewing Company Team

Whether or not the American Craft Beer phenomenon turns out to be a bubble after all, Ballast Point's owners got out (or in) at the right time. Well played, gentlemen. I just hope we don't soon see "Change Your Latitude" ads for Lime Sculpin, with a wedge in the bottle's neck.
Tomm Carroll, beer writer, Beer Paper LA, The Celebrator



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BEST OF 2015

THE TAPS FISH HOUSE AND BREWERY TEAM GABF MID-SIZE BREWPUB OF THE YEAR

By Daniel Drennon

Photos by Matthew Combs

In the sports world, they have the "Comeback Player of the Year" or The ESPYs will honor "The Upset of the Year." For the year in beer in Los Angeles and Orange County, there is no doubt that the best comeback and/or biggest upset of 2015 was TAPS Fish House and Brewery winning "Mid-size Brewpub of the Year" at the recent Great American Beer Festival (aka GABF and the Academy Awards of Brewing).

Consider this: TAPS, which opened in 1999, had won GABF Brewpub of the Year twice before and won 20 combined medals at GABF and the esteemed World Beer Cup. For my money, there is no close second to TAPS being the best kept secret in local craft beer. Given that they are one of the oldest craft beer establishments locally, I am always shocked at how many beer fans, especially on the LA side of the Orange Curtain, have not been to TAPS. Their beers and reputation for the first fifteen years were largely formed by their critically acclaimed brewmaster, Victor Novak. Novak is known for brewing classic beer styles exactly to style. Hence the flood of awards TAPS garnered. TAPS also produced several head brewers under Novak who went on to their own critical acclaim: Evan Price at Noble Aleworks; David Huls at Barley Forge; and Kyle Manns at Bottle Logic.

These three formidable brewers leaving to become brewmasters at other Southland breweries was followed by Novak himself leaving TAPS in 2014 for Golden Road Brewing. When one place loses that much talent, the challenge to recover is nothing short of enormous. As owner Joe Manzella put it, "Victor carried our flag for 15 years."

So 2014 was the ultimate transition year for TAPS. And that was reflected when their historically strong showing at GABF was replaced by one in which only one beer out of ten they submitted even made it out of the first round. Owner Manzella and President Chris Snyder knew they had to make a move to get back to the top. Manzella jokingly bet Snyder \$10,000 he couldn't get David Huls to return to TAPS from Barley Forge.

Snyder took the bet and did indeed get Huls to return. Meanwhile, Huls' close pal Kyle Manns, who had come out of the gate strong by winning a GABF gold medal for then brand new Bottle Logic in Anaheim, had left Bottle Logic after a year due to health concerns with his wife. Snyder asked Manzella if, "he wanted to double down on whether he could get Manns to return as well." Manzella passed on that bet, lucky for him, as Snyder did go get Manns as well.

With Huls and Manns back in the fold at TAPS, Manns in turn brought Jonathan Chiusano,



Chris Snyder, Kyle Manns, Joe Manzella and David Huls

his former assistant brewer at Bottle Logic, to join what was suddenly becoming an all-star team of brewers. Adding to that team was current TAPS head brewer Steven Torres. TAPS had gone from losing four great brewers to having four great brewers...in one year. The new challenge was whether four "head" brewers could all come together and work well as a team.

Kyle Manns points out, "There is no 'I' in team."

The four men are close friends and the collaborative brewing effort between TAPS' two brewing locations, the original in Brea and the newer location in Corona, seemed to be going so seamlessly that a different beer and recipe by each of the four brewers was submitted to the 2015 GABF.

Manzella and Snyder arrived in Denver for GABF in October with their new team. They admit they were not quite sure what to expect with the disappointment of the previous year and the newness of the team. According to Manns, the brewing team itself was confident and proud of their entries. "We didn't expect to win, and if we didn't win, we were still extremely proud of our entries. We knew we had a great shot with them though."

Turns out they were right. Each of their beers won medals (two Gold, one Silver, and one Bronze) and the four combined medals vaulted them back to where TAPS had been before: Best Mid-size Brewpub in the United States.

It was a remarkable comeback. It resulted from a bit of fortuitous timing, but most of all the skill of ownership (Manzella) and leadership (Snyder).

Manzella smiled recalling it, "The organization is better than just one person. Losing Victor was a shock but it gave us a new canvas and the opportunity to do things a little more edgy when we brought back David and Kyle. We wanna do more styles and we wanna expand our barrel program. We are close to a production site and we will be bottling."

Snyder says of Manzella, "The best thing about having Joe as an owner is that he is like the guy who commissions an artist. He pays for the canvas and the paint, but he gives these guys total creative freedom."

That freedom is paying major dividends for TAPS. Four bad ass brewers who work together for a greater good which is, for our benefit as beer fans, great beer.

Huls grins. "Our goal is world class in every glass."

Manns, his friend, nods agreement. "It's all in the team concept. When we hang our banner, it will read GABF Mid-size Brewery of the Year. And usually you list the head brewer on the banner, but ours will read, the TAPS Brewery Team."

He adds. "It's not often that you meet people that you want on your team of life and not just on your team at work. These guys are that for me."

So TAPS is back. But you may not have even known they ever left because, as I said, they are the best kept secret in LA beer. Do yourself a favor and visit any of their three locations - Brea, Corona, and now Irvine. Oh, by the way, TAPS is one of too few beer destinations at which the food is as excellent as their beer.



Taps Fish House & Brewery in Brea

2015: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back for Craft in L.A.

By John Verive

Craft beer in Los Angeles hit a stride in 2015, with a long list of openings and expansions, a panoply of new beers hitting taps and bottles, and it even made some national headlines. As the industry matures and develops, we may look back at 2015 as the year that beer got serious in the City of Angels. It's no longer just a hip fad, locally brewed craft beer is now soaking into the culture of Los Angeles.

Rise of the Arts District

The renaissance of Downtown Los Angeles is in full swing, and development is touching every corner of the once dilapidated urban core. More restaurants, more bars, more museums, and so many more people are calling DTLA home, and the Arts District has developed so many beer-fueled businesses it might as well be called the brewery district now. Back in 2013, in BPLA's very first issue (Downtown Los Angeles Attracts the Attention of Craft Beer's Coolhunter), we told you how Angel City's destination brewery and tasting room would be an anchor for a craft beer revitalization in the Arts District. This year two new breweries opened in that neighborhood, with two more just weeks away from pouring their own brews.

Mumford Brewery's airy and modern tasting room launched just as L.A. Beer Week was getting underway in June, and Boomtown Brewery began to host special events and distribute kegs to nearby craft beer bars. The long-anticipated Arts District Brewing Co. should soft-open in early December, and while the sprawling brewpub has been in the works for years it looks like it will be worth the wait. The ambitious Iron Triangle Brewery is waiting on final permits and hopes to open doors by the end of the year. Just over the river to the east, Dry River Brewing launched, and while there's no onsite tasting room, Dry River's beers have been popping up at bars on the east side (check Sunset Beer Co. to get a taste).

That's a lot of beer now pouring in the Arts District, and frankly it's nice to see that some of these beer businesses are meeting the challenges of working within the City of Los Angeles head-on. Perhaps the red tape that's been a significant barrier to new breweries opening within city limits will start to thin out as the bureaucracy begins to understand that craft breweries' considerable economic engine are an important part of revitalizing these once maligned neighborhoods.

The Arts District wasn't the only region to see new breweries firing up their kettles in 2015. From the continued emergence of the "San Fernando Beer Corridor" — which added San Fernando Brewing Co. on the north end and Brewery Beer Company in Glendale — to the further development of the South Bay as the center of L.A.'s craft brewing scene, it feels like every corner of L.A. is seeing new breweries open.

L.A. Beer Week Migrated to June

The L.A. Brewers Guild bit the bullet in 2015 and organized the 7th L.A. Beer Week a full three months earlier than its traditional September home. Temperatures were a bit cooler, and the brewers a bit less drained from a summer's worth of events, and L.A. Beer Week 2015 was one of the best iterations of the weeks-long party yet. The move was predicated by a very busy craft beer schedule at the end of summer, and the marquee opening festival also moved from Chinatown to Exposition Park. While the home of the kickoff festival is still up in the air for 2016, June is the new permanent home for the week-long celebration of craft culture.

Established Breweries Expand, Struggle with Growing Pains

As more people in Los Angeles develop a taste for craft beer and turn towards locally produced brews, L.A.'s breweries are racing to keep up with the swelling demand. There was some impressive expansion by local brewers in 2015, and perhaps the most impressive example is Strand Brewing Co.'s new giant space in Torrance. The veteran "Class of 2010" brewery left behind their quaint original space for a massive, 36,000 square foot facility complete with all new brewhouse and voluminous tasting room. The brewery is also expanding their beer selection with an added pilot batch brewing system dedicated to turning out tasting room exclusives and experimental brews. Even more exciting is what's in store for 2016 from Strand: cans.

Three Weavers Brewing Co. grew their brewery's footprint, added considerable cold storage space, fermentation tanks, and cooperage, and began to distribute bottles of their core

Mumford Brewing in LA. Photo by Matthew Combs



brews (and the occasional special release). Smog City announced the opening of a satellite tasting room in Long Beach that's slated to open in February 2016 and also brought in more tanks and equipment, and the fan-favorite Torrance brewery also expanded their barrel-aging capability and released one of the more sought-after L.A. beers of 2015 (Cuddle Bug). King Harbor Brewing Co. unveiled their Harbor-side tasting room on Redondo Beach's International Boardwalk, and the small taproom is brimming with charm and character.

The first bottles of tart and wild brews from Beachwood's spinoff Blendery were released in October, and the tasting room on Long Beach Blvd. is ready to open (as soon as there's more beer to pour). Look for more Beachwood Blendery bottle releases in the new year.

El Segundo Brewing Co. finally shuttered their original tasting room and replaced it with a new venue on the brewery level of the building with more seating, more taps, and some real ambiance. Their "Day One" program of bottle releases and other special events have packed the larger space with the brewery's thirsty fans, and ESBC has emerged as one of L.A. beer's best success stories. The new space and the continued evolution of the beers have been so popular that ESBC is on the verge of outgrowing their Main St. facility.

While many craft breweries are expanding as quickly as possible and by any means necessary, L.A.'s craft vanguard Eagle Rock Brewery weathered some growing pains in 2015. The brewery's sister restaurant opened in late 2014 and once again the ERB team was stymied by the City of L.A. as they've tried to get the Public House's own brewhouse approved and permitted. The latest word is plans for an on-site brewing system have been scrapped, but ERB still hopes to add a supplementary tasting room and retail shop to the Public House restaurant. Eagle Rock Brewery's owners have always advocated for slow and controlled

growth, and they're dedicated to making the most of the space they have instead of growing their production capacity, even though this meant "retiring" beloved flagship Solidarity from year-round production. Solidarity, "just doesn't pay the bills like we need it too," said ERB founder Jeremy Raub, and the iconic black mild will now be a springtime seasonal brew. Eagle Rock Brewery also dropped Stone Distributing after continued struggles with the distributor's treatment of ERB's beers. They've contracted local start-up Wiegand Family Distributors to handle ERB beers in 2016.



Rich Marcello of Strand Brewing. Photo by Julie Verive

The Elephant In Atwater

The biggest story in L.A. beer in 2015 was undoubtedly the sale of Golden Road Brewing to AB InBev. Announced days before the Great American Beer Festival began in September, the sale was finalized on November 19th (though financial details of the sale are still unconfirmed). As L.A. craft beer fans fell over themselves to proclaim on social media that they saw it coming, knew it would happen, and didn't care because they didn't like GRB beers anyways, the big picture of what the sale means for the craft beer scene in Los Angeles didn't get much attention. Golden Road was by far the biggest producer of craft beer in Los Angeles. But now they can no longer be defined as a "craft brewer" by the Brewers Association, and they may be expelled from the L.A. Brewers Guild. Golden Road was on-pace to brew 40,000 barrels of beer in 2015, and up to 60,000 barrels in 2016. That's a big slice of L.A.'s total craft beer production; the smaller figure is about as much beer as Eagle Rock Brewery, Strand, El Segundo, Three Weavers, Smog City, Monkish, The Dudes, and Beachwood Brewing made combined in 2015. Even with the addition of all the new brewhouses in the county, and the expansion of existing craft breweries in L.A., the total amount of "craft" beer made in Los Angeles in 2016 could be down from the 2015 production.

Looking Towards 2016

Expect more of the same over the next 12 months. More new breweries opening, more improvement in the locally made brews, and more surprises from the business side. Los Angeles will also see an increased presence of beer companies from outside the region edging into L.A. Besides the announcement of Lagunitas building a \$200 million brewery in Azusa, Modern Times, Ballast Point, and Karl Strauss are all rumored to be opening new locations in Los Angeles in 2016. It's a pretty great time to be a beer lover in L.A.

John Verive is a freelance writer and Certified Cicerone® dedicated to helping his hometown of Los Angeles become the great beer city that it deserves to be. He covers craft beer for the Los Angeles Times, Paste Magazine, and is the founder of www.beeroftomorrow.com. Follow him on Twitter and Instagram: @beeroftomorrow.



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BREWER'S CORNER

A Brewer's Story, Life Lessons, and Being "For Sale"

by Joel Elliott

(Editor's Note: Joel Elliott attended an information session at Golden Road at which they were to explain how and why they sold their brewery. I asked if he would like to report on that for the paper. He delivered something much more provocative.)

In 1998, on a whim, I sold all my belongings and moved to Hawaii.

After failing college twice, my life had fallen into a 40-hour routine of reporting to an office cubicle. It was an entry-level position at the family firm and although my job description allowed me to avoid office politics and workplace drama, it was apparent to everybody that I did not belong there. It wasn't a bad job and had I played my cards right it could have led to a great career but I understood that my participation wasn't by choice, but out of necessity. I wasn't especially unhappy, although I really wasn't happy either. Mostly, I had a hard time accepting that I was working so that I could afford to make payments on the car I needed to get to and from work.

So, I got on a plane and without any real plan, I left everything and everyone behind. It was the beginning of what was probably the most defining and formative period of my life.

My family had left Hawaii in the late 1970's after spending nearly forty years there. When my grandfather left the service, he stayed on the islands, raised his family and built restaurants that included Elliott's Chuckwagon which, when he died, became Flamingo Chuckwagon. It operated there, if I am not mistaken, until sometime after the new millennium. Rumor had it within our family that one of his original employees, a waitress named Patty, worked there through all the changes until it was eventually demolished to make way for a shopping center. She must have liked it.

Though I was uprooted at an early age and essentially raised entirely on the mainland, I would come to learn that I had still been raised as a "local" in certain respects. My dad taught me to speak pidgin and of the subtleties of that real local-boy kind of humor that you are exposed to only in the poorer neighborhoods. Pork is "pig" and saying "shaved" ice is a mortal sin. My older cousins taught me the humility of having white skin by recalling stories of having been beaten up for being haoles.

I went back to see if I could find out who I was and where I had come from. Some of the fuzzy memories of my early childhood were asking for clarification.

Shortly after arriving, I found myself living in a very small, extremely local neighborhood at Sunset Beach on the North Shore of Oahu. The house was a dilapidated, insect and gecko infested, single wall shack with 3 rooms and electrical problems. If you didn't check your bed, chances were good that you might snuggle up to an 8-inch centipede with a hell of a sting. The house stood about 25 steps from the sand if you went the long way. It was perfect.

Through some friends, I landed a job washing dishes at a restaurant in Kaneohe. It was just enough to get by on and for the next few years I lived a life that can truly only be described as perfection. I surfed in warm, clear water every day, ate fruit from the land and fish from the sea, enjoyed my bicycle and drank beer from Tahiti and New Zealand. My car cost \$400 and couldn't go over 50 MPH but that didn't matter because I never had to go faster than 35. I made friends that had the wanderlust; young people that had been traveling the world for years and it became clear to me that life is only ever exactly what you make of it.

At one point I had an opportunity to purchase a house down the road across from Velzyland. Named after Dale Velzy, a famous surfer from the early days, Velzyland is one of the many world class reef breaks that dot the North Shore. At that time, it was known not only for its waves but for the row of ten or so houses that lined the shore there. More like huts, the owner rented the houses seasonally to traveling surfers for next to nothing. Hard drugs and theft were rampant and the area was considered a bit of a slum. My friend Mark was a recovering heroin addict and had gone totally off grid for a while and lived in the bushes there. He would body surf alone a quarter mile offshore at the outer reef. "Surfed Revvies!", I can still hear him growl with a childlike enthusiasm. He survived by eating wild chickens and stolen rice.

The house for sale was listed at \$125,000 which might as well have been the same as all the money in the world. At the time, I couldn't believe anybody would pay that much for a house that was on the main road and so close to Velzyland. In retrospect, the truth is that I couldn't believe anybody would be willing to pay to own something that seemed like it already belonged to everybody. It's not that nobody owned anything. If you took somebody's stuff, they would find you and punch you in the face until they felt like you had gotten the point. It's just that the concept of owning a house and the land seemed so foreign then. Buying that house would have been the opposite of what my life was all about at that moment. I was free. I came and went as I pleased. I could have dumped everything again and gone to Fiji or the Cooks and it wouldn't have made any difference.

It wasn't just me. That was the collective attitude on the North Shore then. Nobody was worried any more about money than they had to be. And because we didn't need much, we didn't have much. Without having much, we didn't worry much. We were wealthy in our lack of wealth and in the experiences we were having with our world and with each other. Life was defined by our daily adventures and by the stories we were later going to be able to tell.



Joel Elliott at Strand Brewery. Photo by Terrance White

We weren't making payments on our lives. We owned them outright. And that \$125,000 house sat for months without a single offer.

Then Blue Crush happened.

The production of that film brought with it the circus that is Hollywood. The mainland perspective brought complications that should have no business in that simple Hawaiian countryside. It marked the beginning of the end for our little point in space and time. When Hollywood came, they realized they could afford houses and land in Hawaii that they couldn't afford in Los Angeles and they wanted to own in a bad way. The choice between a one-room condo on the LA's west side or a home in paradise isn't much of a choice at all when the price is the same.

Overnight, real estate values skyrocketed and the conversation on the North Shore underwent a fundamental shift from the quality of experiences had to the value of property owned. People that had previously never even considered thinking about the value of their homes were suddenly millionaires because of them. It's hard not to fixate on money when it's falling on you from the sky. The question that had never been previously asked was now being asked daily, hourly and by the minute, "do you realize how much your house is worth?"

The collective attitude of "ours" became "mine" and that was the end of that.

Change happens and money is a catalyst. It is simply a cold matter of fact. In our case the money and the change evaporated forever an innocence that had been the foundation for a way of life.

Despite my heartbreak, it would be unfair to blame anybody in particular for the death of my perfect world. After all, it is painfully naive to expect anything to just stay the same as it ever was. Change is an inevitability we all must accept. It is life and we are all part of it. Certainly by the time I had arrived on those sun-bleached shores covered in those beautiful glistening bodies with turquoise waters on one side and lush green jungles on the other, the area looked and felt nothing like it had in the old days. There were roads and stores and houses, a supermarket and a shopping center, a resort. Certainly my arrival marked the end of an era for someone before me. The end of my moment is the beginning of yours.

When your moment is over, it's over. If you can't find a reason to continue, there is absolutely nothing wrong with selling your house and moving on.

Eventually, I would find myself back in Los Angeles after traveling an arduous path to get here. I would team up with some old friends and begin to create what is now Strand Brewing Company. In a strange way, the craft beer industry would display certain similarities to that time in Hawaii before Hollywood.

In order to understand one moment in your life, sometimes you have to look back for the answers in another.

Today the owners of Ballast Point announced the sale of their company to Constellation for one billion dollars. They sold their house and moved on.

As it becomes more widely known that there is money to be made in craft beer, I am often faced with friends and strangers alike brazenly asking if I realize how much money my brewery is worth. Each time I am asked, it reminds me that I have seen this all somewhere before and I hope that they can't see the cringe beneath the smile. They don't understand that our moment isn't over yet.

Joel Elliott is the co-owner, President, and brewmaster at Strand Brewing.

DAN ABOUT TOWN

The Monthly Adventures of LA's Most Infamous Craft Beer Drinker

by Daniel Drennon

November was our first-ever San Diego focused issue so I focused on drinking a lot of San Diego's finest. Flights Beer Bar in Hawthorne. Beer buyer Marc Dacal came up from San Diego to run the beer program at a 2015 newcomer Flights in Hawthorne (LAX adjacent). Flights has 40 taps and Dacal tends to bring in a lot of beers from San Diego and from NorCal where he also spent time in the industry. This night he featured five beers from one of my new San Diego favorites, Fall Brewing. They were all exquisite! After that warm up, it was time to really head south for San Diego Beer Week. I started with an afternoon event at local favorite, The High Dive. Ballast Point was featured and rumor has it that I may have been seen drinking several of their fantastic Devil's Share single malt whiskeys with Sculpin chasers. Not a bad start. Then it was off to the VIP Opening Brewers Session at the waterfront. Most, if not all, of SD's 100-plus breweries were there to celebrate their status as the best craft beer city in the US (sorry Portland and Denver). Too many highlight beers to mention, but I can't recommend enough that you make the pilgrimage south to experience the eclectic list of breweries our sister city to the South has to offer. Done drinking? Not hardly. It was off to Tiger! Tiger!, brilliant brewer Lee Chase's super cool beer bar (see Lee Chase interview last issue). This night, our own Noble Aleworks crew led by Evan Price was in town to do battle with local fave Societe. Photos were blurry. So were we by then. Noble won (pretty sure). I did hit several more bars with my good pal Greg Salzenstein of Anchor Brewing but we were back to whiskey by then. This was a thank God for Uber kinda night. Advice from a professional drinker on how to cure that next morning hangover? You go to Karen Blair's wonderful Small Bar for "Beer for Breakfast" featuring a Three Weavers tap takeover. Have a perfect Bloody Mary in one hand and Alexandra Nowell's sublime grapefruit IPL in the other. And the 3W crew in town to represent! Back up in LA, the next cool event was the Broken Skull IPA release party at El Segundo Brewing. The beer is a collaboration with Stone Cold Steve Austin - he of the wrestling ring, movies and reality TV. This is a dude you don't wanna fuck with so luckily I was telling the truth when I told him his IPA was damn delicious. ESBC continues to crush it out of the park with their IPA and DIPA line up. Next up was another incarnation of Walker's Wild Ride, this time in the OC. The four stops were Haven Provisions, old fave Haven gastro pub, the venerable Hollingshead Deli, and new fave Native Son Alehouse in Santa Ana. Other than Walker's Rover leaking gasoline all over The Lion himself, the Lion being rescued by Mike Wondrash who fixed the leaky line, it was a superb day of drinking the elixers of Matt Brynildson and his award-winning team. Local super-rep Shane Kral set the whole thing up and ran it like a pro. Next up was just a relaxed day of day drinking with friends Sean Cole, Desiree Montalvo, and Curtis Thompson from DreamWorks. Lovely stops at the Torrance Trifecta of Monkish, Strand, and Smog City. Oh, and we stumbled upon super chef and co-owner of Haven Gastro pub in Orange - the great Greg Daniels!



Michael and Ken Hollingshead, David Walker and Jeffers Richardson of Firestone Walker

The Day After Thanksgiving. The in-laws have a place in Mt. Baldy where we spend every Thanksgiving. My new favorite thing about that is that Claremont Ales is 15 minutes away at the base of the hill. Simon and Emily's brewery and tasting room is cool and the beers are top notch across the board.



Simon Brown & Emily Moultrie of Claremont Ales



DreamWorks crew with Haven's Greg Daniels at Smog City

Advertisement for Ragin Cajun Cafe featuring a logo with a green dragon, contact information (310) 540-7403, address 525 S. Pacific Coast Hwy, Redondo Beach, and a list of craft beers including Three Weavers, Strand, Monkish, Smog City, Ballast Point, King Harbor, Dudes', Absolution, and Allagash. It also mentions awards like '2015 Best of the Beach Award Winner' and '2015 Daily Breeze Readers Choice Award Winner'.

Advertisement for State Farm featuring a photo of Suzy Zimmerman, an insurance agent, and the text 'Anytime. Anywhere. Any day...'. It includes contact information for Suzy Zimmerman and the State Farm logo.

Advertisement for AMMCG (Adamski, Moroski, Madden, Cumberland & Green LLP) featuring a photo of a beer tap and the text 'YOUR LEADING LEGAL ADVISORS for breweries, distillers, wineries, distributors, investors, wine and beer trade groups'. It lists services like Business Formation, Mergers & Acquisitions, and provides contact information for Thomas J. Madden and Allen G. Bowman.

WISHFUL DRINKING

Have Yourself a Pliny Little Christmas

By Tomm Carroll

As you are reading this, in early December, I am in London investigating the city's ever-booming craft beer scene, and attending the British Beer Writers Guild's annual Awards Dinner. I was in Blighty a year ago too, also for the beer and breweries, among other enjoyments. And since I was travelling during 2014's thanks- and gift-giving season, I thought I'd get into the spirit and pack my beer suitcase with some American-brewed goodies for our beer-loving mates across the pond.

While I almost always take a few craft beers along when I travel to overseas beer friends — be they brewers, publicans, judges, writers or just avid fans — last December I decided to give the Brits on my list what they REALLY want for Christmas: A fresh, hoppy, California-made, top-shelf beer not available to them, or at least not in optimum condition. I brought a case of Russian River's Pliny the Elder. Hell, even the label is in Christmas colors.

So, like a Yank Kris Kringle, or a Pliny Appleseed of sorts, I had in my possession the 12 beers of Christmas, although they were all the same beer; no need to show favorites amongst the giftees! Each was bottled on November 5, and the Plinys and I arrived safely at Heathrow exactly one month later.

Over the next 10 days, I distributed each bottle of the in-demand Double IPA — which isn't always that easy to find in Los Angeles — to an unsuspecting but grateful recipient. Some were good friends and professional colleagues, while others were bartenders I've met over the years or perfect strangers who struck up a conversation with me in a beer bar or restaurant about craft beer — especially the American variety — when they heard my accent.

I wanted nothing in return — although I did not refuse the occasional pint on the house or a couple UK bottles given to me in reciprocity. My intention was not to start an impromptu gift exchange, but rather just to say "Thank you" (or "Ta," as the Brits themselves might say) to them for their tradition of brewing the styles of ales that influenced the US craft beer movement. 'Tis the season, after all.

All I did ask was for the recipients to drink the Pliny as soon as possible, and to keep it cold until then, as its creator, Russian River brewmaster Vinnie Cilurzo, intended. Also, I requested that each of them e-mail me with their thoughts about the beer, when and with whom they drank it, for what occasion, etc., with the intention of including their reactions in this article.

Well, after a little bit of teeth-pulling, I managed to receive replies from 11 of the recipients; the 12th never responded, remains incommunicado and will not be on this year's list! Also, another one never got to taste the beer as it was nicked from him before he even opened it!

Following are their (edited) comments:

I've never tried Pliny before, so it was a real treat. I saved it for Christmas Day. Around 5:00 p.m., after we served lunch at The Bull and before the staff sat down for our "family" Christmas lunch, I went to the fridge, pulled it out, grabbed a few glasses, and shared it among those I'd worked with.

It was gorgeous, everything I had heard and read about: piney, hoppy, sweet, bitter and balanced. Most impressive of all was how well it wore the high ABV; you just couldn't tell. Dangerous at times I'm sure, but perfect for a Christmas treat. Everybody enjoyed it.



With Sameer Patel outside Euston Tap, Central London. Photo by Danise Delgado



With Glenn Payne at the historic Lamb & Flag pub in Covent Garden, where Charles Dickens used to drink. Photo by Danise Delgado

– Mitch Adams, beer and food writer, general manager of The Bull, craft brewpub in Highgate, North London.

I have to say my colleagues and I really enjoyed the Pliny the Elder. I suggested we drink it during the staff holiday party so that I could get a big round of comments and opinions. The outcome was great — positive comments from everybody — very enjoyable drink.

We are big fans of beers coming from America. Fifty percent of our house IPA at Powder Keg Diplomacy, which is Founders All Day IPA, is poured as staff drinks. I truly hope you guys keep up the amazing work you are doing in the craft beer world!

– Daniele Antonini, aspiring actor and waiter, Powder Keg Diplomacy restaurant, Clapham, Southwest London

Pliny the Elder is a beer I love, and I thank Vinnie for this object lesson in how to do big flavours with great balance. I had it on a rare, quiet evening at home by myself — a nice evocation of memories of drinking with dear friends in Falling Rock Tap House during GABF, which is one of my favourite bars on earth.

– Melissa Cole, beer writer, broadcaster, judge and sommALEier, London

I eventually got around to opening Pliny the Elder on Friday, 6th of February, while watching Wales play England in the Six Nations Championship in Wales. It was hugely, refreshingly hoppy, but it seemed to me to have an extra "bitey" flavour compared to quite a few other hoppy beers I've had over the years.

It was a perfect compliment to the rugby game and it went down a treat watching England beat Wales!

– Peter Chutter, West London Branch Pub Liaison Officer, Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA); member, Society for the Preservation of Beers from the Wood (SPBW), Campden Hill branch, West London

We enjoyed the bottle of Pliny on our final (hand!) bottling day of 2014! We've tried fresh Pliny before, brought over by US friends, and we were also lucky enough to be poured some by Vinnie at a festival last summer at Brasserie Cantillon.

I'm always impressed by the deep resinous, orangey hop flavour that is in Pliny; we've studied blogs from Vinnie about how he made the beer and have since adapted some of his techniques, such as staggered dry-hopping, for our IPAs and session IPAs. I think there are now some other great examples of double IPAs available in the US and the UK from the likes of The Alchemist, Hill Farmstead, The Kernel and Siren.

– Tom Hutchings, co-founder and brewer, Brew By Numbers craft brewery, Bermondsey, Southeast London



With Melissa Cole at London's Borough Market. Photo by Danise Delgado

I've been waiting to try this one fresh. After popping the cap, a lovely waft of floral notes hit me — peach, pineapple, grapefruit, subtle pine and earthy resin. I remember having Pliny not as fresh, with a bit more dankness on the nose. However, this fresher version just smelt cleaner. Aroma is not intrusive in any way but soft compared to other DIPAs.

It pours a bright, copper colour with a brilliant white head, leaving some retention. You know from the look this beer is going to be special. The taste pretty much follows the nose — tropical fruits, pine, resin and bready malt. The medium bitterness cuts through the subtle sweetness perfectly

Pliny the Elder is balanced, yet with complexity that will leave you yearning for your next sip. This could be mistaken for a session IPA as the alcohol is so well hidden. Drink fresh!

– Sameer Patel, math teacher and craft beer aficionado, who can be found almost daily at the Euston Tap beer bar, Euston Station, Central London

I shared the beer with the owners of The Rake pub, Mike Hill and Richard Dinwoodie, along with Mark Banks, owner of several bars in London. I'm very familiar with Pliny, having drunk it at the brewery, around San Francisco and at GABF.

If I remember correctly, this bottle was seven weeks old on the day we drank it and still had the pine-fresh aroma, as well as the malt base and testing-the-edge bitterness on the palate. My only complaint: NEED MORE!

– Glenn Payne, beer judge, consultant, former sales and marketing director, Meantime Brewing Company, Greenwich, London

I drank the Pliny with some friends whilst watching "The Lego Movie," of all things, a week after you gave it to me. The beer is incredible — massive hop character, superb grassy notes and beautiful dryness. It complements any meal; I had spicy curry and it cut through the heat, keeping my palate fresh. It was a week after you had given it to me. I had it once before, but it never gets old.

– Josh Woodward, general manager, The Craft Beer Co. beer bar chain, Covent Garden, London

The beer was absolutely fantastic! But I don't need to tell you that. We wish it was available for us all the time. But I don't need to tell you that either. Can you imagine Russian River taps here? The crowd would go mental. Ha-ha!

– Jeno "Jenci" Zsembery, general manager of The Rake (London's oldest craft beer bar), Borough Market, London

So this year, wherever you spend the holidays, give the gift of good beer. It doesn't have to be a "beers across the water" affair with bottles otherwise unattainable to the giftee. It could be across the country, across town, across the street, or across the hall to another office cubicle — as long as it's a great example of American craft beer that you're bestowing on someone.

Make it a Pliny Christmas. Or a Sculpin Christmas — the last year it will be considered craft!

Wassail!

In *Wishful Drinking*, beer writer Tomm Carroll opines and editorializes on trends, issues and general perceptions of the local craft beer movement and industry, as well as beer history. Feel free to let him know what you think (and drink); send comments, criticisms, kudos and even questions to beerscribe@earthlink.net.



With Mitch Adams at The Bull in Highgate, North London. Photo by Danise Delgado



With Jenci Zsembery at the Rake, Borough Market. Photo by Danise Delgado



With Tom Hutchings outside Brew By Numbers, Bermondsey, Southeast London. Photo by Glenn Payne

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MINOR LEAGUES

Bruery Batch 1731 Homebrew Competition Winner

By Kevin E. Osborne

Back in May, I was lucky enough to win best of show in The Bruery's Homebrew Competition. The beer that won was inspired by a session IPA, but fermented 100% with the "wild" yeast *brettanomyces*. I keep a blend of brett strains which is maintained like a sourdough starter and feed it every few weeks to keep it alive. There are at least ten unique strains in my culture, so when corresponding with Andrew Bell from The Bruery leading up to brew day, we decided the more strains they could add, the better. We ended up using four, with *Trois* being the primary strain.

Hops were another hurdle to overcome. My recipe called for El Dorado, Mosaic, and Chinook. The Bruery decided to make 180 barrels of my beer so we needed hundreds of pounds of these varieties, none of which was part of their hop contract. Thankfully, at the last minute the hops were procured.

One might think this beer was an odd choice for a brewery which explicitly does not make IPAs. Though I'm now recalling that their last home brewer collaboration was Batch 1000, a hoppy dark Cascadian rye ale. My collaboration with them will be called Batch 1731, the randomness of which suits my anarchistic tendencies.

Highland Park Brewery, The Good Beer Co, Craftsman, Phantom Carriage, Monkish, Casa Agria Specialty Ales, Beachwood Blendery, Dry River, and the soon to be Homage Brewing are all killing it with their wild beers. The popularity of sour, funky beer is not an accident, because brett is amazing. It can consume almost any sugar source including those in oak, dead yeast, and other long chain sugars left untouched by normal *saccharomyces* strains.

After a beer is completely dry, brett can still break down and survive on carbohydrates, proteins, and even alcohol; continuing to create flavors and aromas months after fermentation is complete. Brett strains possess glycosides which allow them to break down the flavor and aroma compounds of ingredients such as hops and fruits to create flavors often described as tropical, which are not found in any other beer styles. It can metabolize small amounts of acetic acid (vinegar) and other organic acids that may be present to produce unique esters such as ethyl acetate, which can add pear-like flavors (but in high doses can become nail polish, so be careful of oxygen exposure). It can scavenge oxygen to help keep beers tasting fresh and preserve hop flavor and aroma. Unlike other yeasts, it can survive in very high alcohol beers and at a very low pH. As Chad Yakobson from Crooked Stave found, it can even turn the disgusting bile-like flavor from butyric acid into ethyl butyrate which gives a distinctive pineapple aroma.

Brettanomyces can be counterintuitive in the most novel ways. When used in secondary or for bottle conditioning, brett will completely dry out a beer and create very funky and farmhouse like flavors. But when used as the primary fermentor, it can create very clean and delicate beers that don't necessarily become super dry. Despite there being only a few strains commercially available, the genetic structure of brett is twice as complex as normal ale yeast strains, giving it the potential for larger intraspecies variation. Some new micro-labs such as Bootleg Biology and The Yeast Bay have started releasing some really exciting new strains this year.

Very little research has been published on the characteristics of brett, so this information is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. It is a fun time to be in the beer industry! Nobody should be wary of attempting to make sour and wild beers anymore. There is so much information available now on sites such as Milk the Funk and The Mad Fermentationist, and on the Sour Hour podcast. Chad Yakobson's interview on The Brewing Network is full of very good knowledge. When used correctly, brett can make the most delicious of beers. So give it a try!

We brewed Batch 1731 at The Bruery on Tuesday October 27, which just happened to be the annual release day for Black Tuesday. This was the first major event they've held in their barrel cellar, and it was magical. I have an unhealthy obsession with oak, and walking into that building with its hundreds of barrels stacked high to the ceiling was inspirational.

Look for Batch 1731 to be released by The Bruery in January 2016!

Kevin E. Osborne is a homebrewer, soon to turn pro brewer with his own brewery project, Cellador Ales in North Hills, where he will be making 100% oak-fermented mixed-fermentation American wild ales. Watch for releases on Instagram @Cellador_Ales.



Photos by Matthew Combs



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