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Martin Svab, Co-Founder of Phantom Carriage.

Photo courtesy of Phantom Carriage.

Martin Svab is one of the best beer minds in greater Los Angeles. He's also an unabashed filmophile. For nine years, he was a producer and director of development in the film biz. He got out of that ruthless world for the friendlier confines of craft beer, first as a sales rep for Stone Brewing, then as the beer czar at Naja's Place.

At Naja's, the granddaddy of LA beer bars, Svab made a name for himself in the rapidly burgeoning LA beer scene. Naja's was one of the first bars to start holding regular brewery nights, tap takeovers, and festivals. (Read full cover story on page 12)

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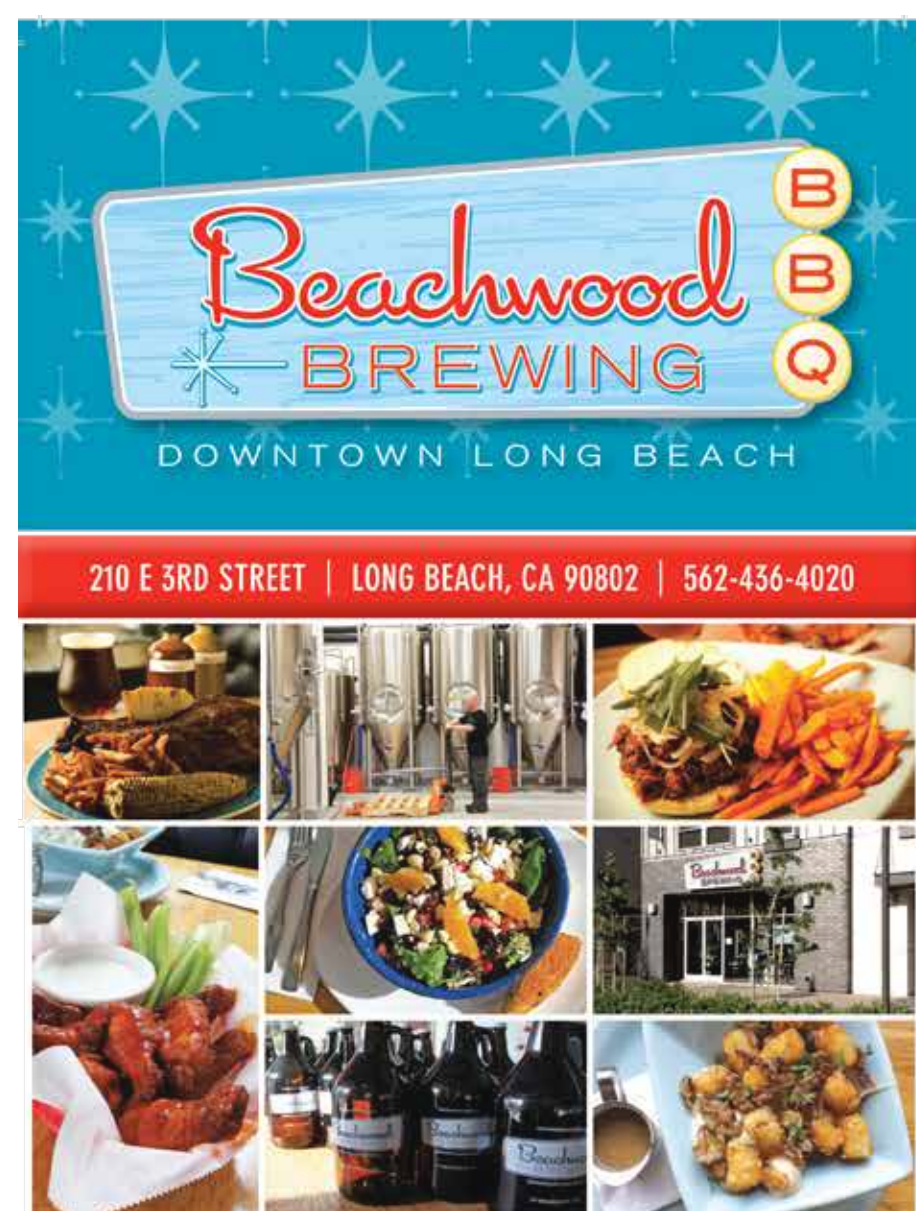
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WISHFUL DRINKING

CALLING OUT SOME GREAT LOCAL BEER - A SIX-PACK OF 2015 FAVES

By Tomm Carroll

It's hard to believe, but as recently as just over a half-dozen years ago, Angelenos longing for local craft brew had to venture behind the Orange Curtain to slake their thirst. Unless, of course, there happened to be a beer on tap from Pasadena's Craftsman Brewing at an area bar.

But by fall 2009, we had two breweries and a brewpub launch almost simultaneously: Strand Brewing in Torrance, Eagle Rock Brewery in Glassell Park and Ladyface Ale Company in Agoura Hills — all of who are celebrating their sixth anniversaries; the latter two hosted events in late January at their respective venues.

By the close of last year, LA County was already around the 40-brewery mark (including contract brewers)! And only a few days into the new year, the long-awaited Iron Triangle Brewing in the downtown Arts District invited friends and media for a soft opening, and had its grand opening in late January.

With more breweries on the way, there seems to be no stopping this juggernaut. The Los Angeles craft beer scene has gone from famine to feast, drought to deluge. You'd think we were trying to rival the boomtown days of the 1920s, when LA was actually the fifth-largest producer of beer in the United States!

Well, with so many local breweries, it's inevitable that the best would eventually separate themselves from the rest — not to mention the worst (you know which ones) — not unlike the wort being separated from the undissolved solids in the mash. And from very good breweries, naturally, comes very good beer.

I've never been one for putting together lists in order of preference, or for rating beers or breweries (you won't find me on RateBeer or Beer Advocate). I do JUDGE beer — to style — in homebrew and professional competitions, including the 2015 International Beer Cup in Yokohama, Japan last September, but that's about it.

However, when a brew passes my lips — especially a product from our local breweries — that blows my palate away (in a good way), it's almost enough to make me reevaluate my values of not evaluating beers. So no, I'm not going on Untapped (a completely narcissistic, braggadocious, masturbatory excuse for a beer app in my opinion — but that's for another column) anytime soon, but I am going to sing the praises of that beer, and others equally impressive, to anyone who will listen.

Said beer was the debut batch of a Brett farmhouse ale called Selah from Torrance's Monkish Brewing, which I recall was first released in summer 2014. After inhaling its enticing aroma, I was just gobsmacked by the flavor; "a dollop of funk carefully wrapped in leaves of lemoness," as I remember spontaneously describing it.

Monkish brewmaster Henry Nguyen had been making some exquisite beers since the brewery's inception in 2012, and had recently begun making sours and funky beers. As wonderful as they were, Selah was game-changer. There was a deep complexity in the flavor and mouthfeel that made it taste more like a rustic Saison from a Belgian brewery that had been brewing for decades, if not a century.

I'm not the only one who was smitten by Selah in 2014; several other local beer scribes, including John Verive and Aaron Champion, were equally taken with the beer, which provoked all of us independently to declare it LA's Best Beer of the Year. Given that beer epiphany, it's only logical that I'd be on the lookout for LA County's most impressive brew(s) of 2015.

Now I know, you're probably wondering why my choices are appearing late, in the February issue of this paper. Well, to pick the best of the year, you have to include the ENTIRE year. And with newspaper deadlines as they are, not to mention the holidays, the January column was due in mid-December. I'm glad I waited because two of the brews I loved weren't even released until the last weeks of 2015.

I found five (well, actually six, due to a tie) beers to be particular palate-pleasers for me last year:

1. (tie) — Amburana Porter, Three Weavers Brewing, Inglewood, and Raised Eyebrows — Highland Park Brewery.

The former is an imperial porter aged on chips of the rare (in the US), namesake, indigenous Brazilian wood, stealthily acquired by brewmaster Alexandra Nowell. The hard wood imparts a woody, mild-chocolate flavor with a distinctly cinnamon-esq note, suggesting a holiday-spiced beer. The beer style is exactly correct for the intensity of "spice." Brewed as a one-off, this beer deserves an encore batch!



The latter represents a personal best wild ale from a brewery known for excellence in the style. It is made with guava and passion fruit that brewmaster Bob Kunz sourced from behind the brewery and in his neighborhood, and was fermented in wine barrels to create a complex, funky, tropical treat. Bottles of this beer are extremely hard to come by, so plan ahead for the next release.

2. Spittin' and Cussin' — Smog City Brewing, Torrance.

This draught-only version of the mid-December-released This Sour Future — a red wine barrel-aged sour brown ale (and no slouch itself) — with cherries added was sneak-previewed during L.A. Beer Week, but has matured and now approaches the delectable, sweet-and-sour-cherry pie filling flavor of Belgium's famed Echt Kriekenbier from Brouwerij Verhaeghe.

3. Cucumber Kölsch — Santa Monica Brew Works.

The surprise hit of last summer's L.A. Beer Week Kickoff Festival, this unlikely but undeniably refreshing pairing of vegetable and beer style was a one-off take, by brewer Drew Pomatti, based on the brewery's German hybrid style. At the fest and elsewhere last summer, it won over many who tried it. This perfect warm-weather thirst-quencher deserves to be brewed again. Are you listening, Drew?

4. Spelt Saison (Propagation Series No. 008) — Beachwood Blendery, Long Beach.

An extremely limited draught and bottle release from Beachwood BBQ and Brewing's new spinoff sour-and-wild-ale project, this Saison, brewed with spelt, fermented with Brett, dry-hopped with Hallertau Blanc and aged by barrelmaster Ryan Fields, was released with little fanfare the day after Christmas. While earthy, fruity and spicy now, this beer will only improve with further bottle-aging.

5. Olivia — Monkish Brewing, Torrance.

Named for the owners Henry and Adriana Nguyen's first child, this all-Brett Blonde Ale was fermented in the brewery's own French oak foedre (which originally held white wine) for nine months, a gestation period which birthed this mild wild ale with earthy, winey notes and a subtle touch of tart lime. Don't be surprised to see Monkish on this list next year as well.

Brew U: This spring, yours truly will be teaching a craft beer course at UCLA Extension, titled "A Class of Beer: An Overview of the Craft Brewing Renaissance." For more information, or to enroll, see <https://www.uclaextension.edu/pages/Course.aspx?reg=264864&qe=true>.

In *Wishful Drinking*, 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.

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SPOTLIGHT

THE BREWHOUSE - A CRAFT BEER LOVER'S DESTINATION IN SOUTH ORANGE COUNTY

By Allison Foley



All photos courtesy of The BrewHouse



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When the idea for opening The BrewHouse popped into Ron Bland's mind, he said he wanted not only to re-create the casual and rustic feel of a brewery's tasting room, but he wanted to make it a destination type location. "I would rather have you tell someone who is gonna love this than someone who is just looking for the next bar," says Bland. It does feel very much like going to a local brewery in the best way. Cozy communal tables for making new friends, polished concrete floors, white lights strung along the ceiling and board games alongside an overstuffed couch. Not to mention the cool flight holders...they're actually old cigar boxes. Along with Bland's business partner, Andrew Reed, the two are teaching South County about craft beer...one taster glass at a time.

When Ron Bland was a professional brewer a decade ago, he wanted to open his own brewery. After he was laid off, he worked for O'Shea Brewing Co. in Laguna Niguel, the oldest homebrew shop in So Cal. There, he taught many how to homebrew. He realized that the money was more in pouring beer than brewing his own. This thought process is what sparked the idea for The BrewHouse. Bland lives in South Orange County and saw there was nothing like this there, hence settling on San Juan Capistrano as their location.

It should be noted that The BrewHouse isn't a brewery, but they are creating some of their own beers onsite, in conjunction with breweries like Valiant in Orange. Open since November 2014, the establishment has so far attracted working class, upper class and "beer people" or those in the beer brewing industry. According to Bland, industry employees "actually mean more to me than a busy day. When you have beer industry folks, people who want to come here on a regular basis, to me that makes me feel good because that means I've got a good selection." During our visit, brewers for Stone, managers for BevMo, and the buyer for Board and Brew were also imbibing there.

Speaking of The BrewHouse's stellar selection, thirty beers can be seen on their high-tech menu board. No beer has been repeated since opening day, and one to three of their own brews are featured at any given time. The menu board showcases each keg's level and displays any Untapped check ins and Instagram photos The BrewHouse is

tagged in. As they're not yet bottling, this is the only location where house beers Berry Vunderf'l and Rainy Sundae can be experienced. Every two and a half weeks, a new menu is offered. And then there are the to-go bottles. The bottle list can be found on their website www.thebrewhousesjc.net, and is updated every Friday. Bland says that there is "no rhyme or reason, (to the tap list) but we try to cover a wide variety of styles so that everyone can be taken care of."

They like to feature California breweries' offerings whenever possible, however, you can expect to see anything from another state to another country. A glance at the tap list revealed California breweries Smog City and Mother Earth as well as Founders from Michigan and Hill Farmstead out of Vermont. Bland says they've even featured beers from Japan's Coedo, one of his favorite breweries. Bland is so confident with some breweries' styles that he knows the beer will "be phenomenal 99.9% of the time." Super local breweries Artifex, Valiant, and Left Coast are three that customers can expect to see frequently on the board.

Lots of research goes in to procuring the beers. Bland says he will check the current keg and label approvals through TTB and ABC. This way he can know 3-4 months before a beer is released, contact the breweries and lock in a few kegs of whatever strikes his fancy. "Trying to stay ahead of the game is really what I think sets us apart, having a selection of product that you're not going to find in most places," says Bland. Patrons can rest assured that there will always be a mead, a cider, a Belgian, a white beer, a hefeweizen, something hoppy, something barrel aged, something tart n' funky and a few nitro brews. A small appetizer menu is also offered. Some of the munchies featured are a huge soft pretzel, hummus and olive plate, and a meat and cheese plate.

While Bland is ensuring the tastiest brews keep flowing, his business partner is handling the wine purchasing, and spending time behind the bar because he's more of the people person (According to Ron although we thought he was pretty friendly, too). They were recently able to hire a third person, Jordan, so they can alternate Sundays off. Previously, it had been only Ron and Andrew behind the bar for the past year, 6 days a week. "It's been an adventure, to say the least," he says.



Et officitur? Nihit volorem porrum alitia volupis aspid quod etur, consedi ut

Another one of their adventures has been brewing their own beer and scouting locations to do it in. "Our goal has never been to own our own equipment. Why spend millions on equipment when other people already have?" says Bland. "We can literally go to their location, brew the beer and they can manage the fermentation side of it." Depending on what style they are brewing, they go with a brewery who understands it best for optimum results.

And speaking of understanding. A big part of The BrewHouse concept isn't just offering the best craft beer selection, but to teach beer fans about what they're drinking. Bland says many don't understand it's akin to wine tasting. He tells of their building contractor who came to the ribbon cutting. On sampling some beer, he said

"I get it now, I get what you're doing." Bland says with a grin, "We didn't know he didn't get it before!" See what's on tap today at www.thebrewhousesjc.net, then stop in to give them a whirl at 31896 Plaza Drive, Suite D3, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675

Allison Foley has been a CA resident for 33 years and a craft beer enthusiast for twelve. She currently resides in Huntington Beach. Her work has appeared online at sevenmag.com and mainandpch.com, and in print in *Performer* and *Zero* magazines.



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COVER STORY

THE MIND BEHIND PHANTOM CARRIAGE

By Daniel Drennon



Martin Svab, Co-Founder of Phantom Carriage.

Photo courtesy of Phantom Carriage.

Martin Svab is one of the best beer minds in greater Los Angeles. He's also an unabashed filmophile. For nine years, he was a producer and director of development in the film biz. He got out of that ruthless world for the friendlier confines of craft beer, first as a sales rep for Stone Brewing, then as the beer czar at Naja's Place.

At Naja's, the granddaddy of LA beer bars, Svab made a name for himself in the rapidly burgeoning LA beer scene. Naja's was one of the first bars to start holding regular brewery nights, tap takeovers, and festivals.

Svab and his best bud Gianni Diaz had already dabbled in opening what turned out to be a short-lived, one beer brewery called The Gentleman Scholar, as an homage to Edgar Allen Poe. The one beer they produced was the critically acclaimed Requiem Espresso Stout which they brewed at Skyscraper Brewing. Lamentably, The Gentleman Scholar went the way of the dinosaur though Svab says the crowd pleasing Requiem coffee stout will eventually reappear at Phantom Carriage.

As for Phantom Carriage, Svab, the film buff, nay, historian, came up with the name based on

the classic 1921 Swedish film which inspired Ingmar Bergman to make films and was the first to feature special effects and flashbacks. Svab decided to do something different with Phantom Carriage. Brew wild ales.

I sat down with Svab in one of the coolest tasting rooms I've ever visited and asked him how he got here, why a brewery, and why wild ales.

Drennon: Where did you grow up and what were a few of the highlights (or lowlights) of your formative years?

Svab: I grew up in a small town and farmstead just outside of Brno, Czech Republic (it was Czechoslovakia at the time), but my family escaped since, at the time, it was under communist rule and we moved to former Yugoslavia (now Split, Croatia). Then we moved to a small town in Austria (just a couple hours outside of Vienna). After that, we immigrated to California a few days before Christmas of 1983 (I was 6) with literally nothing. As an only child and having to restart our lives from scratch in a foreign land, I learned to truly appreciate the little things in life. Before long my dad (a machinist) opened his own shop in the San Francisco East Bay (that he still has) and that became "home". Starting school and speaking zero English was not the easiest transition (by then I spoke Czech and some German) but that didn't help me for shit. So many rough bumps including acting up and being an elementary school hooligan. But luckily my parents distilled much-needed discipline – and after a brush with the law, I realized they sacrificed too damn much (and had even risked imprisonment under the Communist rule) to come here for me to turn out to be a total fuck up. Having my first job at 17 at a local movie theatre and then a great run at Tower Records taught me the value of hard earned money, respect, and dealing with customers.

At what age did you first think you knew what you wanted to be when you grew up and what was that?

As an only child, I was always creative and very focused on things I enjoyed... namely drawing and writing. So since middle school I wanted to work in film (as an animator) or draw comic

books. So it made sense... and I knew that Art/Film School was my calling. Before pulling the trigger, I did consider for moment a career in law enforcement as a K9 unit – and even Sheriff's Coroner's Division (where I did a project). But deep down I wanted to entertain people... so film it was. I attended the Academy of Art in San Francisco during the mid-nineties and eventually my amazing screenwriting mentor encouraged me to move to Los Angeles if I was serious about "breaking into" film. In '97 I moved to LA and took screenwriting classes UCLA. After finishing the program, I got my first job in film as a Producer's Assistant and, damn, it was eye opening. After approximately eight years in film (ending as Director of Development for small production companies), the beer bug had devoured the film bug in me and it was time to move on.

When and how did you fall in love with beer? And what breweries or specific beers inspired you?

At around 18 years old. Not only were beer and wine never taboo in our household (we were Czech immigrants, after all), I learned to respect alcohol at an early age and would spend several summers in Europe during junior high and even in high school, drinking amazing Czech lagers and helping out at my family tavern in our village (that's been around since 1781). So I fell in love with amazing beer, working behind a bar and in customer service. Growing up in San Francisco's East Bay, the two beers that were milestone experiences for me and guided me toward craft beer were Pete's Wicked Ale and Anchor Steam (and yes, I did drink my share of Zima). Once in LA and sometimes in the early 2000s... Stone Brewing's Arrogant Bastard sealed the deal for me.

At what point did you decide you wanted to own a brewery?

I'm pretty sure it was around 2004. That's when I started home brewing (but I wanted to run a tavern or bar years before). I still have all my notebooks with label sketches, recipes, décor ideas, etc. But in order to open a commercial brewery, I knew that I needed to learn much more. The decision to open a brewery was (pun intended) set in stone when Stone Brewing Co. hired me in 2006.

Tell us about why you are brewing mostly sours.

I absolutely fuckin' love them. And have for many years. It began with Duchesse de Bourgogne, Petrus, and eventually discovered the magical likes of Cantillon and Drie Fonteinen. I fondly remember when I was running the beer program at Naja's Place from 2008-2011; sours were still a very obscure style, especially in southern California. The New World sours from Russian River, Cascade, Lost Abbey, and The Bruery were slowly trickling into the LA market where we were one of the few bars in all of LA that actually got them (since we wanted them). Let me just say this, at one point, we managed to grab six to seven kegs of Russian Rivers Consecration (thank you Vinnie & Natalie!) because NO ONE else really wanted them in the South Bay. That will NEVER happen ever again. The delicate complexity of sours and the beauty of barrel-aged wild beer was something that we knew was the direction we wanted to pursue. When I met Simon Ford (at Naja's Place and our home brew club, Pacific Gravity) and tasted his amazing sours, I knew it was game time! His understanding and love for the style was very exciting.

Why did you choose Phantom Carriage as the name and why is the atmosphere so, uh, well, dark?

Ha! The Phantom Carriage is one of my favorite silent-era films. It's a Swedish film from 1921 and is not only dark in content and theme, but was what many perceive to be the first film to incorporate 3-D through double exposure filming. I always envisioned a horse-drawn carriage, rolling through suffocating fog across a barren moor, oak-barrel en tow. And as someone who loves the darker elements in life...and having many friends who are into the same thing... why not create a place that showcases who I am and our love of cinema, music, and art and share it with likeminded folks.

You're coming up on your one-year anniversary. What have you learned in year one?

That one, it was the fastest year of my life. No bullshit. Two... You have to be in this business because you love it, understand it, and want to contribute to the beautiful industry that is craft brewing. Averaging 70-plus hour work weeks the first year, you have to live, breath and, quite frankly, piss this business. I've also learned a tremendous amount from my business partner Jack Wignot in running a business where, all of a sudden, it goes from the three of us to a full tribe. It also taught me to really appreciate the folks who paved the path for us – from other breweries, iconic beer bars, to beer writers. A lot of amazing folks shared a lot of knowledge with us as we worked hard to open. Now we hope to pass that knowledge along to the next generation.

Are you satisfied with how the brewery is doing and where the beers are at?



Yes, most definitely. We are very proud and honored of the reception we have received for our beers, taproom, marketing – just the overall vibe. We are always learning and trying to make better and better beers. I think it's dangerous when young breweries (or any company for that matter) become complacent after a year in business, a few cool write-ups, and all of a sudden they flip to auto-pilot mode. Only one year in business is nothing. The journey has just begun. I love watching the likes of Stone, Sierra Nevada, Ballast Point, New Belgium and many others as they continue to grow and optimize their operations.

Where do you see Phantom Carriage in five years?

Honesty, not sure in five years. (Svab grins) The brewery will be sold next year to the highest bidder and by year five I'll be living in a cozy Belgian villa in the West Flanders province, raising goats and making artisan cheese. Baking sourdough bread, too. Just fucking with you. Selling is not in the crystal ball. We want to grow the right way, continue to treat our fans and customers with respect, and continue to spread the gospel of good craft beer with a focus on the still-misunderstood world of "wild beer". But most importantly, I want to continue to have fun, make sure our bills are paid and our employees are taken care of, and strive to make world-class wild beers.

Though I know you don't have much of it, what's your favorite thing to do in your free time?

Right?! Free time – what the hell is that?! As a big dog lover, spending quality time with my senior pups. Aside from that, trolling swap meets with my girl after a few 8 am mimosas... hitting record and comic stores with a vengeance... and sharing a good conversation over a good pint with good people.

Breweries continue to open at a steady clip. At what point does all the craft beer camaraderie between breweries turn to a survival of the fittest competition?

It's slowly starting to happen here in the Southern California market. And it's bound to get worse. It's the nature of business. Capitalism, really. But I also believe there are many breweries that understand when someone is in it for the right reasons. Those breweries are aligned and help each other out. That won't change. It's the others. In it for the wrong reasons. Let's remember... there are A LOT of people in the US. Customers are becoming more and more aware, educated. They scan sniff out bullshit real fast. Look, life is short enough. As long as we do the best we can, I think survival of the fittest is something to be aware of, but not dwell on.

What advice would you give to someone who has the dream to open their own brewery?

I would say do it for the right reason(s). Learn about the industry. But before that... Brew. Beer. Let's start with that. I highly encourage them to actually work at a local brewery. Know the ins-and-outs of the business you're trying to open. If all you want to do is hang out, drink beer, attend festivals to pick up on chicks and somehow get rich... there are much faster ways of getting there than opening a craft brewery. But if you feel like your beer and vision will contribute to this growing craft beer renaissance we're experiencing... by all means. Do it. Oh, and don't be a dipshit. No one likes a dipshit.

If you only had one word to describe yourself, what would it be?

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FOUNDERS LAUNCH

FOUNDER'S LANDS IN LOS ANGELES

By Daniel Drennon

One of the best breweries in the good ol' USA, nay the world, has finally arrived on the sunny shores of the City of Angels. All of Founders' beers are excellent, but their hallowed Kentucky Breakfast Stout (known to beer fans simply as KBS) is angelic. Their own description is simple and accurate:

A barrel aged stout, KBS is brewed with a massive amount of coffee and chocolates, then caged in oak bourbon barrels. ABV: 11.2%; RateBeer Rating: 100.

This utterly sublime brew is so sneaky at 11.2% abv that you may find yourself drinking four of them as I did at Naja's official launch party. Then you may ask yourself, "How did I get here?" Then you may find yourself trading your favorite (Hamilton's Tavern) hoodie to Founders Midwest Sales Manager Chad who realizes you are drunk and vulnerable. Then you wake up in Chad's slightly too small Founders hoodie. You have to explain to your wife why you're in another man's hoodie but it's all worth it because, God, is that beer spectacular.

Other official launches were held at Barbara's at the Brewery and Blue Palms. At Blue Palms, Brian Lenzo pulled out all stops to show the folks from Michigan how we roll in Tinseltown by literally rolling out a red carpet on Hollywood Boulevard (see Bernie Wire's photos). Find yourself some Founders to make your own assessment. My only complaint is why didn't they come West ten years ago.

For event photography, contact Bernie Wire at bernie.wire@gmail.com I Shoot Beer People...



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BREWER'S CORNER

COMMON IPA FAILS

By Brendan Megowan

West Coast IPA. The formula is usually the same - a simple malt bill of pale malt mashed for a dry body with light bittering hop additions. Heavy flavor and aroma additions precede massive dry hopping. They can be made well at a wide range of alcohol levels from 4% session ales to deceptively strong double IPAs up to 8% and above. Above 8%, malt character becomes more pronounced and hops struggle to stay in the spotlight. The key to these styles is to create a fresh aroma that pops out of the glass and a flavor that can deliver what the aroma promises without being sweet or malty. If you can smell the freshness of the beer sipped by the person next to you, then the brewer, distributor, and retailer have all performed a collective win. If you aren't getting this type of freshness, then there's a problem. The range of quality found among hoppy beers in the marketplace is vast and if you walk down the aisle at one of the big box beer stores, you will find rows of hoppy beers claiming pretty much the same thing. If you are an obsessive hophead like me, you probably have tried many of those beers only to be greeted with aromas of sherry and cardboard. If you are really unlucky, your IPA may smell like rancid butterscotch (the dreaded diacetyl) or old vegetables (DMS.)

If you haven't yet experienced a beautifully fresh IPA, I suggest you immediately head to a local brewery known for such things (El Segundo Brewing, Smog City, Beachwood, Three Weavers, etc.) and explore how amazing these types of beer can be when brewed, cellared, and served properly. So what sets the beer served at these breweries apart from the rows of swill on the warm shelf and how can we as home brewers avoid the classic pitfalls that ruin so many a hoppy beer? IPAs fail in three main areas: wort production, fermentation, and distribution/ retail channels.

Many brewers often overlook the importance of water chemistry when making hoppy beers. Higher than desired mash pH can darken wort (not yet fermented beer) and

muddle the crisp flavors of hops. This is the same reason baking soda is used in pretzels. The high pH encourages a mallard reaction (caramelization) to give the pretzel it's nice brown appearance, but we don't want too many of these types of reactions in our session IPA. Poorly filtered or non-filtered water can also contribute unwanted chlorine which again may lead to a malty flavor and inhibit yeast activity. In addition, if the brewer fails to bypass a water softener, they can end up brewing with water high in sodium which can add a fullness and sweetness at low concentrations, and contribute a salty flavor at higher concentrations. Two popular brewing salts are calcium sulfate (gypsum,) and calcium carbonate (limestone.) The ratio of these two salts contributes to the perception of malt and hop flavors. Brewing water with more gypsum than limestone will accentuate crisp, hop bitterness, while brewing water with more limestone will accentuate full mouthfeel and malty characteristics. Obviously, full mouthed, sweet, salty, dark malt flavors aren't what we are going for with these hoppy styles, so the importance of brewers understanding their water chemistry cannot be overstated.

Once the wort reaches the cellar, the yeasts begin to ferment the beer in two stages: aerobic and anaerobic (with and without oxygen.) If the yeasts are not healthy or there are not enough of them, the oxygen may not be completely consumed and may darken the beer. A cooked vegetal flavor indicates an off flavor compound called DMS and can be caused by not chilling the wort quick enough after boiling. Diacetyl is a compound most popular as microwave popcorn butter flavor, but it is commonly produced during fermentation by brewer's yeast. The thing is, the yeast will also metabolize this compound and render it tasteless if given enough time with a warm enough temperature. This flavor can indicate the process may have been rushed out of the brewery before the yeast could clean up the beer. DMS and Diacetyl are also common flavors that indicate infection, so only the brewer knows for sure. The consumer will know they hate the beer, but will they know who to blame? The brewer? The cellarman? The infected lines at the bar? The answer may be all three or something unknown along the way. The most common causes of IPA fails in the cellar include inappropriate yeast pitching rates, over filtering, poor sanitation, oxygen exposure, the physical action of pumps beating up hop oils, and improper storage temperature.

Sherry and cardboard flavors are a symptom of distribution and retail problems, mainly the degradation of hop oils and alpha acids due to oxidation, age, high temps, or a combination of the three. This oxidation also affects the malts by making the beer darker and maltier. When an abused or neglected beer is poured, the color will appear darker than expected. The lack of head retention will also be noticeable by observing the size of the bubbles. Hop oils play an important role in the structural support of the tiny bubbles that create a nice pillowy head. When these oils are degraded, the pressure of the escaping CO₂ becomes greater than the strength of the bubble wall. This leads to a premature collapse of the head. A quality hoppy beer should have a nice layer of bubbles to the last sip even without agitating the glass. An abused hoppy beer will have its head collapse almost instantly. Common causes for these types of flaws include oxygen ingress at packaging, lack of cold storage at any stage of distribution, poor rotation of inventory, and over purchasing by retail accounts.

This past year, light bodied hoppy beers (especially in cans) have exploded in popularity. During this time, many breweries have rushed into this "obligatory" West Coast style with varying degrees of success. As homebrewers, it's important to identify which characteristics indicate problems and which processes cause these negative changes in our hoppy beer. As a consumer, it's also important to understand which processes to blame in order to cast dollars toward the production and distribution channel that does it right.

Brendan Megowan has been brewing beer for six years, first with the Strand Brewer's Club, then with the Chico Homebrewers club in Chico, Ca. He is currently the brewmaster for a contract brand called Olde Ritual Brewing Co.

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Photos by Daniel Drennon



Tall Alex with his two biggest fans (aka Mom and Dad) at The Rare Barrel in Berkeley



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