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Rick Smets plays bad ass air guitar and brews world class beer at Stereo Brewing

Photo Credit: Nicholas Gingold

Rick Smets was such a natural at homebrewing that his friends would buy him the ingredients if he would agree to make them the beer to drink. Soon, he was making two batches per week. Smets tells me, "You have to love beer. You have to nurture it. It can't be made correctly without a passion."

Once he decided it was his destiny to become a professional brewer, he wrote a letter asking for an entry-level job "to every brewery on the West Coast, from Canada to Mexico." He got an immediate hit from Left Coast Brewing Company in San Clemente. (Full cover story on page 12)

By Daniel Drennon

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COMPETITIONS

ANGEL CITY AMBUSH

by Daniel Drennon



Layton Cutler with Gold Medal Pale European Beer: Eastside Export Lager
Photo Credit: Matthew Garcia @MomentsInBeer

This has been a phenomenal year for Angel City Brewery. One of LA's oldest breweries at 22 years old, the last nine of which have been at their current location in the Arts District of downtown, the biggest news splash Angel City had previously enjoyed was being acquired by Alchemy & Science in 2012, which is owned by Boston Beer Company, makers of Sam Adams.

The current team of brewers, helmed by Layton Cutler, has apparently and not so quietly been upping their game so to speak. Earlier this year, Angel City won the prestigious title of "Champion Brewery" at the highly-respected San Diego International Beer Competition and now they just racked up six medals (two gold, two silver and two bronze) at the inaugural California Brewers Cup recently held in Long Beach at the California Craft Brewers Association Beer Summit.

Impressed by this Angel City ambush at two of our most critically-acclaimed competitions, I headed downtown to interview Layton Cutler about this remarkable run.

DRENNON: *This has kind of been a breakthrough year for Angel City, winning Champion Brewery at the San Diego International Beer Competition and now you just racked up six medals at the inaugural California Brewers Cup held at the Beer Summit in Long Beach. What should that tell beer fans about what has changed or is unique with the current brewing environment at Angel City?*

CUTLER: We were so stoked to find out how well we did in competitions this year. It has been an amazing feeling. Angel City Brewery stepped its game up by really focusing on processes, recipes and dialing in and understanding the equipment we have, like our German brewhouse from 1988. We also learned from our mistakes and continuously expanded our beer-making knowledge by trying out as many styles as possible. We have invested a lot of time into our sour and barrel program along with taking a passion in brewing a wide variety of lagers. Now that there are so many great breweries in LA in such a short amount of time, we feel we are

a part of the rising tide of LA brewing. We hope other breweries and beer fans are looking to us for tasty beers and interesting ideas.

DRENNON: *What was your training and path to become the Angel City Head Brewer?*

CUTLER: Started out studying Chemistry at Purdue University and no joke wanted to make fireworks as a career. I worked for a firework display company for a few summers and didn't fall in love with it but had a blast. I did however start to fall in love with craft and foreign beer during college and a study abroad year in Berlin, Germany. After graduation, I did an internship at Bell's Brewery in Comstock, MI and realized how much I loved it. From there, I headed into a brewing and distilling program at Heriot-Watt in Edinburgh, Scotland. Those two things were magical. As a student in Scotland,

I helped brew cask beer at Stewart Brewing, then after school I came back stateside and brewed at Shoreline Brewery in Michigan City, IN. After that, I worked a stint at the AB brewery in Newark, NJ in the lagering cellars, then the packaging lab. Right before coming to LA to work for Angel City I was head distiller at Widow Jane/Cacao Prieto in Brooklyn. That was all about making heirloom corn whiskies and various rums.

DRENNON: *Do you have a brewing philosophy?*

CUTLER: First make what you and your brewers want, then make what you are told to based off what the market says. Honestly though, I want and strive to make some good fucking beer. It's not a one-man show, so I listen to other's ideas and give credit where it's due. If the first iteration of a

(COMPETITIONS continued on page 6)

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Tom McCormick, Layton Cutler (Head Brewer) and Joe Moakley (Original Brewer and Magical Wizard)

Photo Credit: Matthew Garcia @MomentsInBeer

(COMPETITIONS continued)

beer doesn't work, then make tweaks and improve. Always be brewing.

DRENNON: *What have been your most important lessons learned as a brewer?*

CUTLER: Be patient and don't rush because that's when costly errors are made. Pay attention to the process and the people around you because we work together to achieve our best. Listen to your peers and ask questions because they have probably made the same mistakes before.

DRENNON: *Have you had mentors? Who are they and what did they teach you?*

CUTLER: Steve Stewart of Stewart Brewing in Edinburgh taught me a lot about brewing and working with what equipment you have to make excellent beer. The most expensive brewhouse and cellar don't always give you the best beer.

DRENNON: *What interesting projects are you working on and what do you have in the pipeline?*

CUTLER: To commemorate our Batch 2000, we're coming out with a pear saison brewed with gin botanicals. We will release that on the bar as soon as it's ready. In addition, as a side project, we are going to take a portion of that saison and place in ex-gin barrels to sour and age for up to a year. Another fun project we are working on is our Funky Seoul Medina – a Korean melon sour that won us a gold medal at this year's San Diego International Beer Competition in the Brett and Other Sour category. It was a total experiment last year using California-grown Korean melons and it ended up being such a tasty beer that we're planning this bigger batch for an additional release in 2020.

DRENNON: *How do you feel about experimentation in new styles or doing twists on existing styles?*

CUTLER: Getting to be creative and scientific at the same time is the best part of being a brewer. The brewers and I love working with new ingredients, even if they don't always pan out. Take a style and find the ingredients that might work and you are off to the races. I also get a little



Silver Medal Alternative Fermentable Beer: Rap On the Beezer

Photo Credit: Matthew Garcia @MomentsInBeer



Angel City Brewery at LA Beer Week Kickoff back in 2018

Photo Credit: Matthew Garcia @MomentsInBeer

jealous of other breweries when they come out with a totally experimental beer that I wish I thought of, but in the end I'm super happy to be in this industry when we push each other creatively.

DRENNON: *Do you plan to do any collaborations and, if so, why do you like collaborating?*

CUTLER: We have a couple of brewery collaborations in the works launching sometime next year. This summer, we worked with LA LGBT Center to make a Lemon, Ginger, Blackberry, Tea and Quinoa (LGBTQ) Ale. And right now, we are brewing a Smoked Saison with Plums and Pluots for an upcoming Skid Row Housing Trust event, Trust at 30, in which we worked with a local chef on determining the beer style and flavor profile given the course pairing. Collaborations have proved to be a great way to get more brains and ideas involved, while working closely with friends and neighbors.

DRENNON: *It sounds like Angel City is pretty dedicated to partnering with and giving back to the local community? What inspires you guys to do that?*

CUTLER: The inspiration behind giving back to the community is that it's no longer enough to be a brand just producing a product and putting out into the world. Consumers want to know what your brand stands for, what you hold important, and what values you see as paving the path forward. For us, we want to ensure that we're good community partners, helping out with causes we believe in and helping make LA a city where everyone is welcome.

DRENNON: *What is the long-term vision for Angel City?*

CUTLER: As brewers, we want to keep developing our skills and put out creative beers, along with some old-world styles. We continue to strive to make a name for ourselves in the emerging LA brewing scene by remaining innovative, while retaining traditional brewing methods to make delicious, drinkable beer.

DRENNON: *Having brewed at Angel City for the past six years what are some highlights?*

CUTLER: Getting to see the growing LA beer/brewing scene come from almost nothing to what it is today in

the second largest city in the US. It's been fun being a part of the evolution of the DTLA brewing community and turning a lot of people on to craft beer. I also had the pleasure of working with some great intern brewers that went on to be prolific in the brewing landscape in LA and elsewhere.

DRENNON: *Do you want to name the interns and where they are now?*

CUTLER: Matt Zelek was at Firestone-Walker and now at Pinhouse Pizza in Austin, TX., Tyler Thurman at Highland Park, Logan Smith at El Segundo, Cooper Lang at El Segundo and now at Arts District, Garrett Margolis at Dry River. We also have two former interns as Angel City brewers now: Alex Kennedy and Josh Zuniga.

DRENNON: *Between talent and work ethic, which is more important?*

CUTLER: I am of the mindset that work ethic defines us. Working hard is not teachable and nor is being talented, but at least a good work ethic means you are striving to be your best. It's better to earn it than having it given to you.



Angel City's Champion Brewery Award
Photo Credit: Matthew Garcia

DRENNON: *If you weren't a brewer, what would you be?*

CUTLER: Probably making fireworks or trying to do pyrotechnics in the movies. I always had pyromaniac tendencies as a kid and I really enjoyed science so it made sense when I was younger. Fireworks and beer are both about mixing specific ingredients for a desired outcome. Looking back, I am glad I went down the path of making beer since it's so interesting to see the depth and experimentation of the brewing community.



Bronze Medal European-Style Dark Beer: Black Lager

Photo Credit: Matthew Garcia @MomentsInBeer

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WISHEFUL DRINKING

FALL FORECAST: SOUTH BAY GETS SMOGGIER THE PORTERS' NEW PROJECT TURNS U-BREW INTO BREW U

by Tomm Carroll

With its recent acquisition of the defunct Zymurgy Brew Works on Hawthorne Boulevard in West Torrance (the brew-your-own facility that opened some three years ago), Smog City Brewing has opened its second location in the city, with a taproom and pilot brewery that will also allow patrons to brew their own — but with an emphasis on beer and brewing education.

Owners Laurie and Jonathan (also brewmaster) Porter held a “super-soft opening” of the new Smog City West on a Wednesday afternoon in mid-September, and before long it was packed with a crowd of die-hard Smog fans eager to check out the new digs and to be the first to sample the new small-batch sours and experimental beers that will be the hallmark of the

suds served here (although all were made at the main brewery as SCW's license-to-brew was still pending). Among them were Reluctant King, a mixed-fermentation Saison with Flavor King Pluots; The Sour Hungarian, a Sour Brown/oak-aged Imperial Stout blend; Yamala, a gastronomic-inspired Saison with yams; and Shelf Bier, a Belgian Table Beer.

Also dropping by to congratulate the Porters was Bill Baker, the erstwhile proprietor of the space when it was Zymurgy. “This is soooo cool!” he said, obviously blown away by the changes made to the space. “Awesome!” Those included a comfy lounge area, with banquettes and low tables made from the top portions of barrels, and a long wooden bar by the 18 tap handles.

It was at that bar that *Beer Paper* managed to pull up a stool and chat with Porter (Jonathan) about the concept for Smog City West over several tasters of the new brews.

“We will be a fully licensed brewery, an already established brand with a certain reputation, but because the brew-your-own concept means that we help you make beer that you then take home, our challenge is that anything that goes out the door must be to our standards,” Porter explains. “It *has* to be, because they are gonna take it home and say, ‘Oh, I made this at Smog City.’ That is one thing that really ups the ante on this space and this equipment.”

But he is confident it will work. “It’s going to be me, or people I specifically train on this system, brewing,” he says. “Because to make beer on a very small system, it’s really hard to knock it out of the ballpark.” The brewhouse will include two or three 22-gallon brew kettles and the brewing will occur on Mondays and Tuesdays, at least initially, when the facility is closed, according to Porter, who adds, “Luckily, we have all the resources at the main brewery to lean on.”

He also points out an important distinction between Smog City West's BYO business model and Zymurgy's: “They catered to individuals, whereas we’re going to be geared toward groups, like homebrew clubs, more on team-building and also educational brewing. For me, this place is more about education than it is about brewing beer for people to take home. That’s something I’m really excited about.”

And education, of course, begins at the source. “First and foremost, it’s going to start with staff education, so if I’m not here, we’ll have people who understand how to talk to patrons about what we do, because this *is* a business. We’ve got to make that work before we get on our high horse,” Porter adds. “And I see that translating into classes for the public at large.



Jonathan and Laurie Porter
Photo Credit: Smog City West

We can bring in knowledgeable beer writers and judges and our friends at White Labs to come talk to people about beer styles, unusual ingredients, etc., and educate them about those kinds of beers.”

From Smog City's standpoint, that attitude can extend to anything else — like brewing something it doesn't normally brew. “Experimentation is where half the fun is,” Porter attests. “The excitement in discovering new and great things has been put on the back burner, and I’m hoping we can change that — at least for our local population here. And that’s what I intend to do.”

While the instructional approach may seem a slightly different concept for Smog City, its brewmaster feels it's totally within his brewery's wheelhouse. “I want to take beer education to the next level besides just teaching people ‘what beer is,’” explains Porter, a BCJP-sanctioned beer judge and certified Cicerone. “I think that as an industry, we did a great job for a long time telling people, ‘Drink craft beer; it’s better than the big brewers’ crap. But one thing we failed to do was teach them what *good* craft beer is.”

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Smog City West lounge area

Photo Credit: Laurie Porter

Noting that the plethora of craft beer now makes it ubiquitous, he claims, “But there are a lot of people getting into the game who don’t have the right talent or the resources — and the quality is not there. While those beers may be challenging to the palate, off-flavors are still off-flavors and fermentation flaws are still fermentation flaws.

“And so now we’re like, ‘Yeah, craft beer...great,’ Porter continues. “But it turns out, it’s *not* all great. I think that retailers and distributors have lost sight of beer education. We *all* need to do a better job of educating people what good craft beer is. And I’m excited to rekindle that educational flame.”

As an example of that need, he cites frequent comments regarding the current trend among craft breweries, Lager (still the most popular beer

style in the world, thanks to the dumbed-down versions made by the industrial breweries): “We still get this a lot at the brewery, which leaves us scratching our heads — ‘Well, I don’t like Lager; I’ll have a Pilsner,’ or ‘I don’t drink Ales, only Stouts or Porters.’ Perhaps there’s some education required here...”

Smog City West is currently open Wednesday-Friday, 3-9pm, Saturday 12-9pm and Sunday 12-8pm. The Grand Opening celebration is Saturday, October 12, 12-10pm, after which time, the open hours will increase.

Award-winning beer writer Tomm Carroll is a BCJP-schooled judge and beer instructor himself, and is delighted to support a brewery that provides a chaser of beer and brewing knowledge along with the ales and lagers that it pours. Contact him at beerscribe@earthlink.net.



Smog City West

Photo Credit: Laurie Porter

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RITUALLY BREWING GREAT BEER NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

by Andrew Smith



Owen Williams and Steve Dunkerken

Photo Credit: Shelley Smith

When Owen Williams first approached Steve Dunkerken about opening a brewery, Dunkerken wasn't interested. Williams was a recognized industry veteran that was kicking his heels a little. As Director of Brewing Operations at BJ's, he'd opened eleven brewhouses, then a dozen more breweries as a consultant. "When you're consulting, the thought is always there," Williams confessed. "He was homebrewing and I came to him with a glimmer in my eye. He'd always said the answer was no, but I was able to talk him into it." They opened Ritual in 2012. "It's been badass ever since."

Dunkerken's apprehension was understandable. A high-profile CFO, he traveled around the world, working for companies like Price Waterhouse.

Williams just happened to catch him at the right time. Between them, there's a yin and yang dynamic. Dunkerken's speech is measured, while Williams speaks with excitement. "He liked my beer," noted Dunkerken. "I did more than liked the beer," corrected Williams. Dunkerken had been homebrewing for many years. "I went from style to style, really trying to nail what I wanted. I was very particular about flavor and ingredients." Added Williams: "He makes it sound really easy. I was enchanted by his system, how clean he was. It was a frickin' hospital in there."

That dynamic extends to their business compatibility, although not quite as you'd assume. Dunkerken is the office guy, Williams the brewer. But whereas Williams had been restricted at BJ's,

Dunkerken's homebrew background was a creative force. Most of the early recipes were his, including Ritual's first beer, Fat Hog. With Williams stuck on jury duty, Dunkerken brewed that first batch by himself, the first time he'd brewed on a professional system. There were mishaps, as Williams was more than happy to share, then conceding: "He's a hell of a brewer." That first batch won a medal, Williams adding, "Every time we brew Fat Hog, we wonder what's going to fuck up. When it does, we win a medal."

As a base, Redlands had both romantic and practical appeal. Dunkerken grew up there and reminisces about a time when it was all orange groves. "This was on his paper route as a kid," interjected Williams, adding, "For me it was the water, the same aquifer as Arrowhead. Without great water you don't have great beer." Dunkerken also cites the city's continuous support and the Redlands vibe. "Downtown there are almost no chains. Everything's very native and homegrown." I mentioned Eureka! and was quickly corrected: "Redlands was their first location. They blew up from there. They were also our first account."

Seeking an 18,000 square-foot space, they happened upon 23,000 with designs on distribution. "I really didn't want a taproom," commented Dunkerken, "but was told that we'd need it to connect with our customers." He speaks candidly about his initial disregard. "We had no tables. People were placing their plastic cups on the floor." They only had a 4-handle kegerator. Today, Ritual has a hugely impressive taproom. There's room for 250 people, and another 3,000 in the parking lot. There are 24 taps, cask, and rotating barrel selections. One cool element is the long counter tables and bar top, manufactured from the repurposed wood of 1960's bowling lanes.

Wanting to make an impression from the outset, they opted to avoid "the beers everyone else was brewing."

Fat Hog, a barleywine, was quickly followed by Big Deluxe, an imperial oatmeal stout. Their initial strategy was, "hitting around the edges," with beers like Wit's End, Hellion Belgian Golden, and Monk's Lunch. There's a noticeable, full-fledged authenticity in everything they brew. Their Belgians use malt from the oldest maltster in Belgium. Extra Red, their bestseller, is much more substantial than the name suggests, eight layers of malt making for a rich profile against a west coast hop finish. The mindset was, and always has been: "Just make great beer."

Another key from the outset was a remarkable barrel program. Dunkerken made a personal connection with High West, a whisky distillery in Utah. "The pedigree of the barrels was exceptional," explained Dunkerken, "We were getting them within 48 hours, real wet barrels." High West also sent Manhattan barrels, adding extra complexity and undertones. It's inspired events like Hogapalooza, featuring multiple Fat Hog varieties; you'll find them rotating through the taproom. Most recently, they've teamed up with Brickway Brewery and Distillery from Omaha to make "Gold in Gold." It's a collaboration of Big Deluxe and the distillery's Single Malt Whisky Barrels which won gold medals at LA International Beer Completion and LA International Spirits Competition respectively.

There have been plenty of medals, but it's something Dunkerken downplays: "We don't brew for awards or enter a lot of competitions. We just grab bottles from the cooler, the same anyone could get in the store." It's won them a couple of dozen awards. Fat Hog and Big Deluxe have been most decorated, both winning golds at Great American Beer Festival. Fat Hog has also taken gold for the last two years at San Diego International, and Best of Show at California State Fair in 2015.

Williams has made a widespread impression on the industry. Many



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Ritual's tables are made from repurposed bowling lanes

brewers learned under him at BJ's and Ritual. He's lectured "Beer and Culture" at Cal Poly Pomona and "From Beer to Eternity" for University of Redlands, both college credited classes. Dunkerken's pet-project is the Boys and Girls Club; he speaks with pride about the project's impact. He encourages the same of employees. "It's an expectation that our people get involved in their neighborhoods. I think everybody should get involved and make our world a better place."

Dunkerken and Williams make for an impressive duo. Dunkerken's pride is in the details, the reasoning, the how's and why's. The CFO in him seems to carry the same exactitude for formulas to the components of beer and flavor. In Williams, there's energy and excitement. For him, it seems like a lifelong love affair, a crusade to spread the word and encourage others to get involved. It's an amalgamation that spreads into the brewery, ensuring a preciseness and a creativity in everything they do. It's noticeable



Ritual's expansive taproom in Redlands

All Photos by Shelley Smith

from the brewery's meticulous organization to the taste in every glass.

When asked about proudest achievements, Dunkerken simply responds, "The beer we put out every day." When I suggest the medals, he laughs, then admits, "Don't get me wrong. We've got our golds. They're fun. At GABF I was elated. We can pat ourselves on the back and bore your ears. It's not a singular achievement, but something that happens every day when our team comes to work. The

proudest achievement is that we've lived up to our mantra, that the beer has to be great, that nothing else matters."

"Yep. Nothing else matters," echoed Williams.

Andrew Smith has been a craft beer employee and advocate for the past 20 years. Raised in England, he "thought" he knew everything about beer before moving to the United States. He runs a local Coachella Valley blog at CVBeerScene.com

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COVER STORY

HI-FIDELITY BREWER

by Daniel Drennon

Rick Smets was such a natural at homebrewing that his friends would buy him the ingredients if he would agree to make them the beer to drink. Soon, he was making two batches per week. Smets tells me, “You have to love beer. You have to nurture it. It can’t be made correctly without a passion.”

Once he decided it was his destiny to become a professional brewer, he wrote a letter asking for an entry-level job “to every brewery on the West Coast, from Canada to Mexico.” He got an immediate hit from Left Coast Brewing Company in San Clemente. The guy who hired him and who would become his mentor was none other than San Diego legend Tom Nickel. Nickel now owns The Nickel Beer Company in Julian and the iconic beer bar O’Brien’s Pub in San Diego.

Left Coast is owned by Oggi’s Pizza & Brewing and, in 2004, on a team that featured another brewer-turned-legend Jeff Bagby, Oggi’s took home “Small Brewing Company of the Year” at the prestigious World Beer Cup. The young, eager pupil Smets was getting an education in brewing that was, well, priceless.

Smets rapidly climbed the ladder from “cellar rat” to eventually become the head brewer at Left Coast which was Oggi’s production facility. Left Coast took home eight medals at the World Beer Cup or the Great American Beer Festival between 2004 and 2010, with Smets at the helm for the last two years. He credits much of that success to the privilege of being mentored by Nickel.



Rick Smets, Owner and Brewer at Stereo Brewing

Photo Credit: Nicholas Gingold

Smets then accepted a brewing position with Firestone Walker. In his three years there, he says he learned the critical importance of work ethic. Smets points out with excitement, “At Firestone Walker, no shortcuts are ever taken! I was passionate about learning and I learned how to run a brewery. I wouldn’t be half the brewer I am today if I hadn’t learned how to run a tight ship at Firestone.”

DRENNON: Tell me about growing up. What were you into? How did it shape you into who you are now?

SMETS: Growing up in Orange County in the 80’s, I was a skinny kid into skateboarding, surfing, BMX - a backpack full of punk rock cassettes and Walkman along for the ride. I never played video games or watched much TV, preferring to be outside running around. My family is very do-it-yourself. I was working on cars and doing home improvements from the time I could hold a wrench or hammer. My parents always supported my passions and encouraged me to be creative in life.

That’s why I enjoy brewing – it’s a hands-on, bootstrap industry where I can be inventive and listen to punk rock as loud as I want.

DRENNON: Who and/or what inspires you?

SMETS: When I was 16, I spent the

summer at my fringe uncle’s property in Oregon. He taught me all about homebrewing and shared his passion for craft beer. He also gave me my first stack of records at nine years old – The Who, Zappa, Dylan, The Dead. (Thanks, Uncle Greg!) I was hooked on the alchemy and magic behind brewing.

I’m also inspired by the people in my life. My family, my beautiful wife Amanda, and the many wonderful people I call friends. Sharing a pint of my beer with them is a reward in itself.

DRENNON: What was your training and path to become a brewer?

SMETS: I spent most of my 20’s jumping from job to job, following The Dead and homebrewing. In that time, I became an avid homebrewer, brewing up to 150 batches a year in my backyard.

In 2004, I looked to turn my hobby into a career. I sent resumes to every



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Rick and Amanda Pearce Smets

Photo Credit: Nicholas Gingold

West Coast brewery from Canada to Mexico – willing to take any position. I was lucky enough to get a call from Left Coast in San Clemente when they were a startup. There I was able to work with some amazing talent – Tom Nickel and John Wilson. It was a fun time in the industry –helping to shape the West Coast IPA. It was all hops and all IBUs and I loved it. I worked my way up from keg washer to Head Brewer. Then in 2010 I moved to Firestone Walker in Paso Robles. If Left Coast was undergrad, Firestone Walker was a master’s program. The attention to detail and professionalism forever molded my brewing philosophy. You know what’s dirty at Firestone Walker? Nothing.

DRENNON: Do you have a brewing philosophy?

SMETS: Patience! I like to equate brewing a batch of beer to going to a concert. You often buy tickets to a show month ahead of time. You wait for that day to come with great anticipation - so why be late? With beer you have this one shot, one single day to make it the best product possible. Then you wait for a month just to taste the end results. Why hurry through your brew day?

DRENNON: I like that analogy! What have been your most important lessons learned as a brewer?

SMETS: Don’t take yourself too seriously - making beer is fun! Also, it’s important to surround yourself with smart and passionate people. Hiring people with strengths in different areas makes the team stronger. I’m so thankful I get to come to work each day with people just as geeky about beer as me and we all get to learn from each other.

DRENNON: Tell me how you came up with the idea for Stereo Brewing. Why Orange County?

SMETS: Since I started brewing professionally, I’ve dreamed of my own spot – the space to be creative

and brew what I want. Might be the punk rock in me to not follow direction well. It wasn’t until I met my wife that I had the confidence to do it.

When thinking of a brewery name, my wife joked, “no animals or landforms,” But most of all it should be something I deeply connected with. Stereo just felt authentic. My life has always had a soundtrack. Music has the power to evoke such strong emotion. It’s my true passion and brewing is my expression of that.

As for my location I wanted to go back to Orange County – not only because my family is here, but because I think brewery-for-brewery we have some of the best beer in the country. I wanted to be surrounded by other talented breweries to push me to be my best.

DRENNON: I love the desire to be pushed to be your best. And, obviously, music plays a key role in your brewery concept. Like many of us, I too am obsessed with music that has become the soundtrack to my life. So, please tell us more about the profound impact of music.

SMETS: Music is necessary, like air or food. I can’t remember what I had for breakfast, but I can remember the set list from a Pixies concert ten years ago. Sometimes Stereo feels like my own personal clubhouse. I get to introduce people to some of my favorite music and share stories. I love when our taproom staff shares a new band that blows me away. Music can connect all types of people, which is why it’s the perfect pairing for craft beer. Except Journey. Never Journey.

DRENNON: How do you feel about experimentation in new styles or doing twists on existing styles?



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Stereo Brewing

Photo Credit: Nicholas Gingold



Stereo Brewing

Photo Credit: Nicholas Gingold

(COVER STORY continued)

SMETS: Beer is to be revered. I'd like to think I strive to honor the long lineage of great brewers before me. Tradition plays a big part in designing our beers, but I'm not afraid of playing with styles. It's fun to experiment. Really, it's identifying trends vs. fads. While we want to stay relevant, I've

never felt the need to add junk food to my mash tun.

DRENNON: *Amen to that. Do you plan to do any collaborations and, if so, why do you like collaborating?*

SMETS: Collaborations are all about comradery! Looking to do a cross collab at Smog City soon. They are a brewery that's really doing it right.

Also hoping to collaborate with Faction – met Rodger (Davis) at CCBA recently and we just hit it off. We also recently collaborated with Pat McIlhenney of Alpine. That was a surreal day to brew alongside a true brewing legend.

DRENNON: *If you weren't a brewer, what would you be?*

SMETS: I'd probably own a record shop. I clearly don't care about making tons of money and can talk music all day.

DRENNON: *If you had to describe yourself in one word or phrase, what would it be?*

SMETS: Stoked.

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YAEGER SHOTS

FROM TOKYO TO LA: RICE LAGERS

by Brian Yaeger

Think pilsner and you're apt to think Czech. Think Mexican lager and images of maize (either flaked heirloom corn or treacherous HFCS) may pop into your *cabeza*. And when I say Japanese lager, you absolutely imagined a light beer made lighter with rice. Asahi Super Dry is the best-selling beer in Japan and it's made with rice. And corn! But that's not getting in the way of some California brewers' narrative in calling their rice-laden lagers "Japanese-style."

Says Eagle Rock Brewery co-founder Jeremy Raub, "I think it's a bit of cultural appropriation, at least marketing magic, to call these beers 'Japanese lagers.' Let's be honest, they are very similar styles of beer that have their origins in Germany."

Maybe they can start to be called Rice or Reis Helles. Regardless, they're engineered to be light in body and color as well as crisp and dry instead of the IPA equivalent to Lucky Charms marshmallows. They aren't that old or traditional, aren't terribly new, aren't trending, yet aren't esoteric either. At the recent CA Summit Beer Festival, out of some 600 beers, a whopping nine were rice lagers, including ones from the likes of Raub's Eagle Rock, Brouwerij West, and Pocock Brewing. Other notable Southland brewers who weren't at the Summit but make a version include Angel City, San Diego's Eppig, and Draughtsmen Aleworks up in Goleta.

Actually, I misspoke. Brewing with rice is profoundly traditional. There's

evidence of a fermented rice-based beverage from China that dates back 9,000 years. Sake—more accurately described as rice beer than rice wine since it's made with grain, not fruit—appeared in China around 500 BCE, some 1,200 years before it took root in Japan. And even Reineheitsgebot-loving German immigrants made the pre-Prohibition discovery that rice has its time and place in brewing the kinds of lagers plenty of American palates prefer. But what we're seeing are a decent number of craft breweries putting the grain, a type of grass seed, front and center.


Draughtsmen launched three and a half years ago and within months created Nami Biru, as lightly floral as a pot of jasmine rice. Co-founder Scott Stefan lived in Kyoto for three years prior to opening Draughtsmen. "I loved drinking Japanese beers and they sold them through vending machines all over," he said. "My partner and brewer, Reno King, also loves Japanese beer and food...it took us about one second to agree on it." The beer, that's name translates as draft beer or draught beer in their case, features flaked rice. As a year-round production beer, it became the first to be regularly canned by the brewery (co-marketed and branded with vaunted Sushi|Bar in Montecito), despite the absence of beer vending machines in which to stock it.

"We are not strict disciples of the Reinheitsgebot, but almost all of our beers pay homage to it," acknowledges



Jaws from Brouwerij West


Photo Credit: Vito Trautz



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Nami Biru from Draughtsman Aleworks

Photo Credits: Tami Snow

Stefan. Draughtsman makes a Mexican lager called Mas Macho, but in true Mexican lager fashion, it's really an all-malt Vienna lager and contains no corn. And they make Czech Please, a pilsner, which only proves that the world of easy-drinking lagers is greatly benefited by the rise of Japanese-style rice lagers. "They all offer something a little different and very rarely step on each other's toes."

Also in 2016, Angel City introduced Little Tokyo Super Dry. The name is both an homage to their Downtown LA neighboring neighborhood and the first wave of super dry lagers out of Japan. Keith Ely, Angel City's marketing manager, mentioned that they use toasted flaked rice. "As cost per pound, two-row (barley) is cheaper by half than both rice sugar and toasted rice." So let's dismiss any arguments that breweries make these to cut costs. This beer also uses exclusively Sorachi Ace hops from Japan, imbuing the hint of coconut sweetness with a lemony twist.

"I am happy to see that (customers) are asking for 'Crispy Boi/Boy' beers because we as craft brewers get to make these delicious, drinkable beers that really highlight a brewery's technique and showcase a beer that cannot hide any flaws," adds Ely.

I'm So Fancy Can't You Taste This Gold

Of the rice beers at the Summit, they were all lagers and maybe there's something in Sacramento's water, but five of the breweries hailed from that area including Device (with the cleverly named Rice Crispy Boi), Yolo (with the nearly as clever The Riceman Cometh), Mraz, Berryessa, and Dust Bowl. Over in El Granada south of San Francisco, Hop Dogma's Lagers Gone Wild boasted wild rice.

LA's Brouwerij West already had Popfuji, but despite the Japanese-sounding name, it's an all-malt unfiltered lager. The brewers felt they could go even drier and crispier. Behold: Jaws. They're both 5 percent ABV but because Jaws contains 40 percent

raw rice, it's drier than Japan's tiny Tottori desert. It's also so light that it falls shy of gold or straw bordering on clear. It's a fun beer in an equally fun can designed to look like refrigerator magnet letters.

Meanwhile, L.A.'s Eagle Rock pokes fun at the corn vs rice tiff with its rice lager, Don't Maize Me Bro. It debuted in 2017, "Partly from an interest in brewing with rice," says Jeremy Raub, pointing out that the grist is 28 percent flaked rice, "but also partly as a reaction against the explosion of corn lagers that were being brewed by a lot of small breweries at the time...It was our first foray into the realm of light lagers." It's hopped with noble Hallertau Mittlefruh. (On the opposite end of the spectrum, Eagle Rock did make an imperial Mexican stout brewed with corn, cocoa, vanilla, cinnamon, and chiles.)

A short jaunt north, Pocock in Santa Clarita brews Saiko no Raga. The name means "Supreme Lager" in Japanese. With a grain bill that's 30 percent flaked rice and 70 percent pilsner malt, co-owner Todd Tisdell says there's a lot to like about beers like Saiko no Raga, not the least of which is its obvious and divine pairing with foods like sushi and poke. Though it's no slouch with the likes of a burger'n'fries. It's become a go-to beer style I crack at many a homecooked meal, and my kid only wishes we made sushi at home.

Angel City's Ely makes the distinction that rice lagers go with "delicate" foods like udon, as well as "bolder" dishes like ramen, drawing an important distinction. He adds of these beers, "(They) also pair well with Karaoke."

Brian Yaeger is the author of Red, White, and Brew and contributed to the Oxford Companion to Beer. When this Cicerone isn't writing for beer publications he's planning beer festivals. Along with his wife and son (I.P.Yae.) he recently moved to (and is learning to surf in) Santa Barbara, where he's teaching UCSB's first beer-tasting class.



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sageveganbistro.com

San Pedro Brewing Company
331 W 6th St, San Pedro
sanpedrobrewing.com

The Lab Brewing Co.
30105 Agoura Rd, Agoura Hills
labbrewingco.com

Wolf Creek Restaurant & Brewing
27746 McBean Pkwy, Santa Clarita
wolfcreekbrewing.com

TASTING ROOMS

King Harbor Waterfront Tasting Room
132 International Boardwalk, Redondo Beach
kingharborbrewing.com

Smog City Steelcraft
3768 Long Beach Blvd #110, Long Beach
steelcraftlb.com

ORANGE COUNTY

BREWERIES

All-American Brew Works
5120 E La Palma Ave, #103, Anaheim
allamericanbrewworks.com

Anaheim Brewery
336 S Anaheim Blvd, Anaheim
anaheimbrew.com

Archaic Craft Brewery
140 E Main St, Tustin
archaicbrewing.com

Artifex Brewing
919 Calle Amanacer, San Clemente
artifexbrewing.com

Asylum Brewing
2970 La Palma, Suite D, Anaheim
asylumbrewingcompany.com

Back Street Brewery
1884 S Santa Cruz St, Anaheim
backstreetbrew.com

Barley Forge Brewing
2957 Randolph Ave, Costa Mesa
barleyforge.com

Beachwood Brewing Taprooms
7631 Woodwind Dr, Huntington Beach
12900 Euclid St, Garden Grove
beachwoodbbq.com

Black Cock Brewing Company
1444 N Batavia St, Orange
blackcockbrewing.com

Bootlegger's Brewery
130 S Highland Ave, Fullerton
bootleggersbrewery.com

Bottle Logic Brewing
1072 N Armando St, Anaheim
bottlelogic.com

Brewery X
3191 E La Palma Ave, Anaheim
brewery-x.com

Brewheim
1931 E Wright Cir, Anaheim
brewheim.com

Brewing Reserve of California
2930 College Ave Suite D, Costa Mesa
brcbeer.com

Chapman Crafted Beer
123 N Cypress St, Old Towne Orange
chapmancrafted.beer

Cismontane Brewing Co. Tasting Room
1409 E Warner Suite C, Santa Ana
cismontanebrewing.com

Docent Brewing
33049 Calle Aviator Suite C, San Juan Capistrano
docentbrewing.com

Four Sons Brewing
18421 Gothard St, Huntington Beach
foursonsbrewing.com

GameCraft Brewing
23301 Avenida De La Carlota St C, Laguna Hills
gamecraftbrewing.com

Green Cheek Beer Company
2294 N Batavia St #C, Orange
greencheekbeer.com

Gunwhale Ales
2960 Randolph Ave, Unit A, Costa Mesa
gunwhaleales.com

Gunwhale Ales
1501 W. Orangewood Ave, Ste 101, Orange
gunwhaleales.com

Hoparazzi Brewing Co.
2910 E La Palma Ave, Anaheim
twitter.com/hoparazzibrew

Laguna Beach Beer Co
29851 Aventura Ste C-E, Rancho Santa Margarita
lagunabeer.com

Left Coast Brewing Company
1245 Puerta Del Sol, San Clemente
leftcoastbrewing.com

Lost Winds Brewing Company
924 Calle Negocio Suite C, San Clemente
lostwindsbrewing.com

Network Brewery
824 Carnegie Ave, Santa Ana
networkbrewery.com

Noble Ale Works
1621 S Sinclair St #B, Anaheim
noblealeworks.com

Phantom Ales
1211 Las Brisas St, Anaheim
phantomales.com

Riip Beer Company
17214 Pacific Coast Hwy, Huntington Beach
riipbeer.com

Salty Bear Brewing
2948 Randolph Ave Unit C, Costa Mesa
saltybearbrewing.com

Santa Ana River Brewing Company
3480 W Warner Ave Unit B, Santa Ana
www.santaanariverbrewing.com

Stereo Brewing
950 S Via Rodeo, Placentia
stereobrewing.com

The Bruery
715 Dunn Way, Placentia
thebruery.com

The Good Beer Co.
309 W 4th St, Santa Ana
thegoodbeerco.com

Towne Park Brewery
1566 W Lincoln Ave, Anaheim
towneparkbrew.com

Unsung Brewing Company
500 S Anaheim Blvd, Anaheim
unsungbrewing.com

BREW PUBS

Huntington Beach Beer Company
201 Main St, Huntington Beach
hbbeerco.com

Pizza Port San Clemente
301 N El Camino Real, San Clemente
pizzaport.com

Stadium Brewing
26738 Aliso Creek Rd, Aliso Viejo
stadiumbrewing.com

TAPS Brewery & Barrel Room
15501 Red Hill Ave #100, Tustin
tapsbrewery.com

TAPS Fish House & Brewery
101 E Imperial Hwy, Brea
tapsfishhouse.com

TAPS Fish House & Brewery
13390 Jamboree Rd, Irvine
tapsfishhouse.com

Tustin Brewing Company
13011 Newport Ave #100, Tustin
tustinbrewery.com

INLAND EMPIRE

BREWERIES

3 Iron Brewing Company
898 Via Lata Suite A, Colton
sironbrewingco.com

Area 51 Craft Brewery
7123 Arlington Ave #A, Riverside
area51craftbrewery.com

Black Market Brewing Co.
41740 Enterprise Cir N #109, Temecula
blackmarketbrew.com

Brew Crew Inc.
11626 Sterling Ave #G, Riverside
brewcrewinc.com

Brew Rebellion Brewing
13444 California St, Yucaipa
brewrebellion.com

Brewcaipa Brewing Company
35058 Yucaipa Blvd, Yucaipa
brewcaipa.com

Chino Valley Brewery
1630 E Francis St #J, Ontario
chinovallebrewery.com

Coachella Valley Brewing Co.
30-640 Gunther St, Thousand Palms
cvbco.com

Dragon's Tale Brewery
8920 Vernon Ave #122, Montclair
www.dragonstalebrewery.com

Escape Craft Brewery
721 Nevada St #401, Redlands
escapecraftbrewery.com

Euryale Brewing Co
2060 Chicago Ave #A-17, Riverside
euryalebrewing.com

Garage Brewing Co
29095 Old Towne Front St, Temecula
garagebrewco.com

Hamilton Family Brewery
9757 Seventh St #802, Rancho Cucamonga
hamiltonfamilybrewery.com

Hangar 24 Brewery
1710 Sessums Dr, Redlands
hangar24brewery.com

Inland Empire Brewing Company
1710 Palmyrita Ave #11, Riverside
iebrew.com

Ironfire Brewing Co.
42095 Zevo Dr #1, Temecula
ironfirebrewing.com

Kings Brewing Company
8560 Vineyard Ave #301, Rancho Cucamonga
kingsbrewingco.com

Last Name Brewing
2120 Porterfield Way, Upland
lastnamebrewing.com

La Quinta Brewing Co.
77917 Wildcat Dr, Palm Desert
laquintabrewing.com

No Clue Brewing
9037 #170 Arrow Rt, Rancho Cucamonga
nocluebrew.com

Oak Hills Brewing Co.
12221 Poplar St. Unit 3, Oak Hills
oakhillsbrewing.com

Old Stump Brewing Co.
2896 Metropolitan Pl, Pomona
oldstumpbrewery.com

Packinghouse Brewing Co.
6421 Central Ave #101-A, Riverside
pbbeer.com

Refuge Brewery
43040 Rancho Way, Temecula
refugebrew.com

Ritual Brewing Co.
1315 Research Dr, Redlands
ritualbrewing.com

Rök House Brewing Company
1939 W 11th St #A, Upland
rokhousebrewing.com

Skyland Ale Works
1869 Pomona Rd Unit E/F, Corona
skylandaleworks.com

Solorio Brewing Company
9395 Feron Blvd Suite K, Rancho Cucamonga
soloriobrewing.com

Sour Cellars Brewery
9495 E 9th St Unit B, Rancho Cucamonga
www.sourcellars.com

Stone Church Brewing
2785 Cabot Dr Suite 160, Corona
stonechurchbrewing.com

Strum Brewing
235 S Campus Ave, Ontario
www.strumbrewing.com

Thompson Brewing
9900 Indiana Ave Suite 7, Riverside
thompsonbrewing.com

Wiens Brewing
27941 Diaz Rd, Temecula
Wiensbrewing.com

BREW PUBS

TAPS Fish House & Brewery
2745 Lakeshore Dr, Corona
tapsfishhouse.com

Wicks Brewing Company
11620 Sterling Ave, Riverside
wicksbrewing.com



Rosalie

BEER



ROSÉ

It all started with a little brewery born on a California vineyard,
so you could say it was meant to be – an *All Natural* beer rosé named Rosalie.

FIRESTONE WALKER
BREWING COMPANY

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