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IAN MCCALL GETS riiped

Ian McCall, Head Brewer of Riip Beer Co.

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The California craft beer scene leads the country with over 900 breweries and we are spoiled by how many of our breweries are brewing world class beer. And while the best inspire a fervor among beer fans for brewmasters with rock star-status names, there are #2 brewers in the boots who are critical to making those beers exceptional. While you know the brewmaster's name, you may have never heard of that vital assistant brewer.

By Daniel Drennon

(FULL STORY ON PAGE 12)

INSIDE

PINTS & QUOTES



PAGE 6

LADYBEER



PAGE 8

SAN LUIS OBISPO



PAGE 10

SMOKE MOUNTAIN



PAGE 18

BREWER'S CORNER



PAGE 21

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PINTS & QUOTES

BRIAN LENZO'S BLUE PALMS TURNS TEN

by JOHN M. VERIVE

It's a tale ingrained in the fabric of the Los Angeles mystique. An idealistic Midwesterner, full of dreams and a drive to work hard, turns their gaze on the place where dreams can come true: Hollywood. For Brian Lenzo, a pragmatist and dreamer in equal measure, early goals of acting stardom turned into a career in the hospitality industry and new dreams of opening a bar. He wanted to build a place to drink like those inviting dives that dot cities in the middle U.S.A. That bar, Blue Palms Brewhouse on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, was an early center of the craft beer scene in Los Angeles, and it celebrates a decade of pouring beer this month.

I sat down with Lenzo during a busy Thursday lunch service to talk about the history of the bar and what the future for the beloved Hollywood hangout holds. It's a story that's close to me; as a longtime Hollywood resident, Blue Palms is my favorite neighborhood bar and a home-away-from-home. I've seen it evolve in certain ways, stay stubbornly the same in many ways, and even had to say goodbye at one point when the restaurant was about to lose its lease.

Of course, Blue Palms survived the scare, thanks to an outpouring of support from the local community when beer fans across Los Angeles packed the bar for several nights

after a call was made by 38 Degrees co-founder Clay Harding to "occupy Blue Palms." Lenzo says it was the "scariest, most humbling" experience of his career, but the statement helped him to renegotiate the lease on the restaurant, and the beer kept flowing.

The next year, for a story on the bar's 5th anniversary for the Los Angeles Times, Lenzo told me, "You make it two or three years [in Hollywood], and wow. To make it five is a testament to our staff and our customers." Five years later, the beer scene in L.A. is nearly unrecognizable from those early days. Blue Palms however has remained largely the same, at least on the surface. It's still the same brass door, the same stools and bar height tables, and the same Pittsburgh Steelers and Ohio State banners, but the subtle changes are the most important. Chiefly, Lenzo has largely stepped away from the daily operations.

He still starts his day at Blue Palms before heading to Arts District Brewing (which he partnered with L.A. hospitality juggernaut 213 Nightlife to build) and then on to his other projects with 213 (a soon to be unveiled brewpub within the historic Union Station and another secret project near mid-city). He often ends his day with another visit to Blue Palms before heading home to Lake Balboa. He's put 46,000 miles on his truck in two years with this daily routine.

Now handling the operational heavy lifting, including the beer ordering, is General Manager Darby Bricker who's been a part of the Blue Palms team for six years. Like the Addams Family, Bricker says "We're a big band of weird characters, and this building is also a character." The dining room and bar are built into the Fonda Theater (opened in 1926 as the Music Box, which coincidentally housed a lounge called The Blue Palm Cafe in the 40s). The building is now owned by Goldenvoice and the 1200 seat theater hosts acts from across the musical spectrum. The Hollywood Pantages theater is only a block down the Boulevard, while the Palladium

is two blocks south, and Blue Palms is a popular pre- and post-show destination. Bricker says the show nights are a part of the character and the rhythms of the restaurant and it's kept Blue Palms lively.

The Bar Manager, known only as "Bix," has plied the taps and the stick for all ten years of Blue Palm's run, and several other servers, kitchen staff and bartenders are among that original opening staff. In an industry where employee turnover is the expected norm, the team at Blue Palms is tight-knit and has with over 75 years of collective experience at that location.

"My biggest success in this business isn't the beer, it's the people," Lenzo says, visibly emotional about what he's built. And it isn't just the current Blue Palms crew, Lenzo takes pride in the numerous people who've come into the beer world at Blue Palms and moved on to other industry jobs.

More than a half dozen former employees are now in influential positions at breweries and distributors throughout Southern California including former manager Jillian Cooke (St. Archer Brewing), Catherine Plane (Smog City Brewery), Matt Olesh (Modern Times) and Paige Reilly who's now a partner in Tony Yanow's Artisanal Brewing Collective group. "Brian [Lenzo] is an originator of craft in L.A.," Reilly says. "He gave everyone a place to drink and to congregate and to explore craft beer."

In those early years, before hometown breweries were spreading through every neighborhood in Los Angeles, Lenzo spent his days driving to San Diego or to San Francisco to pick up kegs. He had to earn the trust of brewers skeptical of the nascent L.A. scene, but they soon saw that something special was taking root on Hollywood Boulevard. And while the beginning of Blue Palms was fueled by the beer geeks who flocked to Hollywood to get their fix of beer unseen in L.A. before, today the restaurant has subtly shifted focus.

"Blue Palms certainly isn't the top draw for the beer geek any longer,"



Jeff Bagby with Brian Lenzo at Blue Palms

Photo Credit: Daniel Drennon



Blue Palms Brewhouse

Photo Credit: Daniel Drennon

says Danny Becker co-founder of beer news website The Full Pint. Today there are on-trend beer bars spread across Los Angeles, and Blue Palms isn't always pouring the hippest breweries or the most hyped styles. With so much beer available to showcase, Lenzo and Bricker choose to support the people they've built relationships with. "We buy from

our friends," Lenzo says. "We talk to everyone who has beer on our taplist."

It's a simple distinction that underscores the focus on community, and it's a decision that's designed to solidify Blue Palms as the kind of homey, comfortable drinking hole that Lenzo envisioned when he first dreamed of opening a bar. A bar that

didn't have a Hollywood vibe, but had fresh, affordable food and a friendly staff. A bar that felt like it could be in the Midwest somewhere. A bar where even if everyone doesn't know your name yet, you want to keep visiting until they do.

On a recent Sunday brunch service Lenzo dropped by to change the bulb in the projector that beams the tap list onto a screen above the bar. He'd brought his infant son Jack, born in September 2017, with him, and the pride was clear on the elder Lenzo's face as employees and regulars alike fawned over his son.

"It was a dream to build this place," Lenzo says. "Now I get to come in, sit back, and just watch people enjoy it."

Even as Hollywood transforms around it with new condo towers rising to shade the streets and the grit and grime scrubbed from the star-embellished sidewalks, Blue Palms changes only subtly with the times. Most bars and restaurants in Hollywood are ephemeral, opening with booming fanfare before shifting concepts or dissolving back into darkness in scant years, but Blue Palms plays the long game. It's not aimed at the tourists or

the waves of bon vivants looking for the hottest spots, but at the Angelenos living in or near the neighborhood who want a pint. "There's no bubble to pop," Lenzo says of the beer industry in L.A., "just a new generation of beer drinkers who only know craft." He hopes that Blue Palms may one day join the pantheon of Hollywood watering holes such as The Pig and Whistle, The Frolic Room, Boardners and Musso and Franks that are legendary in their longevity.

The Blue Palms Brewhouse 10th anniversary party is Sunday August 12th. Tickets at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/blue-palms-brewhouse-10th-anniversary-tickets-47624011701>

John Verive is Southern California native and freelance writer dedicated to growing the craft beer scene in Los Angeles. He's is a Certified Cicerone®, the founder of Beer of Tomorrow (www.BeerofTomorrow.com), and he covers the beer-beat for the Los Angeles Times. Find him on Twitter and Instagram at @octopushat and @beeroftomorrow.

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LADYBEER

ARTISANAL BREWERS COLLECTIVE: OPENING NEIGHBORHOOD BREWPUBS ALL OVER L.A.

by SARAH BENNETT

Noah Regnery got his start in the beer industry as a teenager slinging pizzas at the original Pizza Port in Solana Beach, a quintessential '90s-era brewpub. As a pizza joint with a 7-barrel brewery shoved into a former storage room in the back corner, it served as an important home away from home for residents of the close-knit beachside community. That it allowed you to drink pints of its award-winning West Coast-style beer within a few feet of the system created it was just a bonus.

Regnery learned to brew at Solana Beach under San Diego beer royalty like Tomme Arthur and Jeff Bagby before eventually becoming head brewer at Pizza Port's San Clemente location, where he won Small Brewpub of the Year at the 2010 Great American Beer Festival. "Some of our brewery advisors told us we shouldn't put a brewery in here its too small, it'll never work," Noah Regnery said last month, standing aside fellow brewer and Pizza Port alum Brandon Edwards inside a shiny 400-square-foot brewhouse at the 3-month-old Bluebird Brasserie in Sherman Oaks. "Have you seen Solana Beach? All the best brewpubs are small like this."

Today, Regnery is Director of Brewing Operations at Artisanal Brewers Collective, a rapidly growing restaurant group co-founded by former Golden Road Brewing co-owner Tony Yanow that is changing the way L.A. drinks craft beer, one watering

hole at a time. Since Golden Road Brewing was acquired by Anheuser Busch-InBev in 2015, Yanow has been reinvesting his cut of the sale back into the local community, scooping up bars and commercial properties and filling them with his vision for what not only L.A., but also craft beer as a whole could use a little more of: neighborhood meeting places that emphasize fresh, independent beer.

"I got into this business by being exposed to London pubs where the neighborhood goes to talk to and relax before going home for the evening," Yanow says. "Culturally, L.A. doesn't have the same emphasis on that third place, so we want to make our bars community places. I want to make places where people can come to be comfortable outside of the house that isn't a living room." Yanow already owns two bars that abide by this mission -- Tony's Darts Away in Burbank and Mohawk Bend, both of which focus on California beer and imaginative vegan food.

He teamed up with a half-dozen other partners (many of them industry veterans he's worked closely with since the Golden Road days) and publically launched ABC in January 2017 with the acquisition of four downtown bars: Library Bar, Spring Street Bar, Sixth Street Tavern and Beelman's Pub. ABC also bought and rehabbed several iconic neighborhood bars like Brennan's on the Westside and The Old Chalet in Eagle Rock.



Bluebird Brasserie

Photo Credit: Sarah Bennett

But it's ABC's brewpubs that are leading a radical shift in L.A. beer by defining a new model for how the scene can continue to grow in the face of rising rents, increased competition and the threat of corporate buyouts. Yanow noticed that even when Golden Road was locally owned, L.A. never had a single anchor brewery -- like Stone in San Diego or, well, Anchor in San Francisco -- that entire city could rally behind. In true Los Angeles fashion, this is just as much a consequence of the sprawl and traffic as it is that the region is comprised of many disconnected cities and neighborhoods, each have their own distinct personality and pride (the cliché that L.A. is "72 suburbs in search of a city" comes to mind).

Like Pizza Port, then, the idea is to stop trying to be the next big thing and instead keep it close, keep it fresh and keep it focused on the surrounding blocks rather than waste time and money pushing for potential customers farther afield. "Running a production brewery is hard. You don't even make money until you become a certain size," Yanow says. "I co-owned the biggest brewery in L.A. and we made the most money out of the pub. [With ABC's brewpubs], I'm trying to get our beer from brewer to customer as fast as possible and with as few ways to mess it up."

In addition to the Belgian-inspired

vaulted brick Bluebird Brasserie, ABC has opened three other brewpubs since last fall, including The Bell Marker in San Diego, British-themed The Stalking Horse (in the beautifully renovated former Steingarten space on Pico Boulevard), and 6th & La Brea, a bright minimalist space named after its prominent intersection on the edge of Hancock Park. A fifth, The Broxton, is under construction in the heart of Westwood.

Each one is expertly designed and has an entirely different food menu, beer lineup and vibe, a testament to Yanow's ability to hire the right talent and build efficient teams. Longtime collaborator Paige Reilly (she helped him open Tony's Darts Away and then managed Golden Road's pub) is ABC's Director of Operations. Daniel Popielinski, ABC's COO, is Golden Road's former Director of Operations. ABC Culinary Director Trevor Faris, Chief Systems Officer Jon Lerdsuwanrut and Bluebird Brasserie General Manager Lauren O'Neill are also Golden Road alums.

None of them have worked at Golden Road since the buyout and all said they joined ABC because they believed in Yanow's vision for bringing beer back to the people. "We have beer bars, breweries and taprooms and it's always been 'the two shall not meet,'" Reilly says. "Why don't these exist here? The way of the world is not in distribution.

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Bluebird Brasserie

Photo Credit: John Verive

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As for what the ABC-brewed beers taste like, Regnery and Edwards' backgrounds at Pizza Port mean that every recipe is built with balance in mind and batches are flawless and precision-point delicious. At the Bell Marker, where former Pizza Port phenom Nacho Cervantes serves as head brewer, there is already a solid lineup of about 20 beers, including cream ales, porters and IPAs.

Until more brewers are hired for the L.A. locales, Regnery and Edwards are spending their days darting between the Valley and Mid-City, making everything from traditional Scotch ales to hoppy Belgian table beers. Already, they've crafted lengthy

lineups of classic and creative brews that are custom to each location, including Belgian and British-style beers at Bluebird Brasserie and The Stalking Horse, respectively (6th & La Brea's brewhouse should be online soon).

"Because they're all brewpubs, there are no have-tos," says Regnery. "We can change it up and do smaller batches of something new, tweak recipes and have fun. Kind of like what we did at Pizza Port."

Sarah Bennett is a freelance journalist covering beer, food, music and more for L.A. Times, OC Weekly, Eater, Beer Advocate and more. She was named the Food/Culture critic of 2017 by the L.A. Press Club. Follow her on social media @thesarahbennett.



6th and La Brea

Photo Credit: John Verive

SAN LUIS OBISPO

CENTRAL COAST BREWING'S
SLO RISE TO THE TOP

by BRIAN YAEGER



Brendan Gough, 2018 Central Coast Brewmaster of the Year

Exotic flavored beers are fairly common now, but in craft beer's youth when ambers and blondes ruled the roost and even baristas would've scrunched up their faces if you tried to order a dirty chai latte, there was a BOP in SLO that brewed a 180 from an IPA. The brew-on-premise was Central Coast Brewing and that long part of the California map between Los Angeles and San Francisco had few breweries. Launched in 1998, CCB would wait nearly two decades before becoming a multiple GABF-winning brewery thanks to head brewer Brendan Gough, but that didn't stop me from bringing up the subject of the beer that dubiously landed CCB on the beer map.

"Ahhh yes, the infamous Chai Ale," said an exasperated Gough. "That beer was originally developed in a partnership with a local company called SLO Chai. The chai concentrate that these guys were making was really good. It had such a wonderful balance of spices and it came in ready-to-use jugs that could be added directly to finished beer." But the company was sold and that spelled the end of the

chai concentrate. "There was a brief attempt to make our own chai in-house but it was never really quite the same. It may end up back on the menu if I get inspired to try and re-create it. In fact, I've been thinking about brewing an imperial version closer to 8 or 9 percent ABV. I'm just focusing on making a bunch of new, fun, and experimental beers while trying to perfect the ones in our regular line-up."

For the record, I tried that beer early on and enjoyed it. It wasn't the only flavored beer coming out of SLO, where a younger Matt Brynildson, now of Firestone Walker fame, was tasked with making SLO Brewing Blueberry Ale. I only remember it because, as a UC Santa Barbara student in the nineties, it was one of the beers that got me to spend as much on a bomber as I had on a sixer of Natty Light.

"Growing up in SLO, I have fond memories of that beer," Gough reminisced. "It was definitely a gateway craft beer." In some ways, Gough thinks "beers like this are great for the craft sector. They get consumers used to the price-point

of craft beer. From there, people become more willing to branch out and expand their horizons. Take a beer like Firestone Walker's 805. That beer has opened the door for so many people who would have otherwise never purchased a craft beer. Next time, maybe they'll try a pale ale, then an IPA, and before you know it they'll be waiting in line for a Monkish can release."

While many of today's craft beer consumers leapfrog over pale ales and start with IPAs—and often stay there—Gough said that it's his Monterey Street Pale Ale that is the best seller at the pub. And for good reason. It has medaled at GABF the last three years running! Gold, silver, then back to gold. Not to jinx it, but let's see if he four-peats next month. Gough isn't holding his breath but, as he said in a non-hubristic way, "I wouldn't bet against it at this point. But there are over two hundred entries in that category, so we'll just have to see."

Incidentally, Gough didn't exactly go straight from homebrewer to GABF medalist. Along the way, he spent time on team Firestone Walker (and I don't just mean that brewery's softball team which, yes, is a real thing and yes Gough plays on it still). He worked at the Central Coast's largest brewery where he picked up

several key practices to running a tight ship. Things like how to minimize oxidation during the brewing process in order to increase shelf-life. Maybe that's not as sexy as some form of hop gymnastics that could stick the landing in designing the perfect IPA, but it's vital to a brewery's growth and reputation. It's why CCB is no longer just some BOP like the one a man named George Peterson took control of in the 20th century. "It was really more of a hobby business for George," explained Gough. "It wasn't until about four years ago when I took the head brewing job that we really started to push things forward and take it to the next level. And take it to the next level, he has. Gough was just named 2018 Brewmaster of the Year for the Central Coast Brewers Guild by his peer brewers.

For Gough, that next level takes on every style. "I think great brewers should be able to brew quality examples of any beer style. From my time as a homebrewer through my days at Firestone Walker and now in my time here at CCB, I have always prided myself on learning how to brew the classic styles and really understanding the brewing process and raw materials." That's what keeps the taps flowing both at the original location on Monterey Street (for which the pale ale is named) and a new

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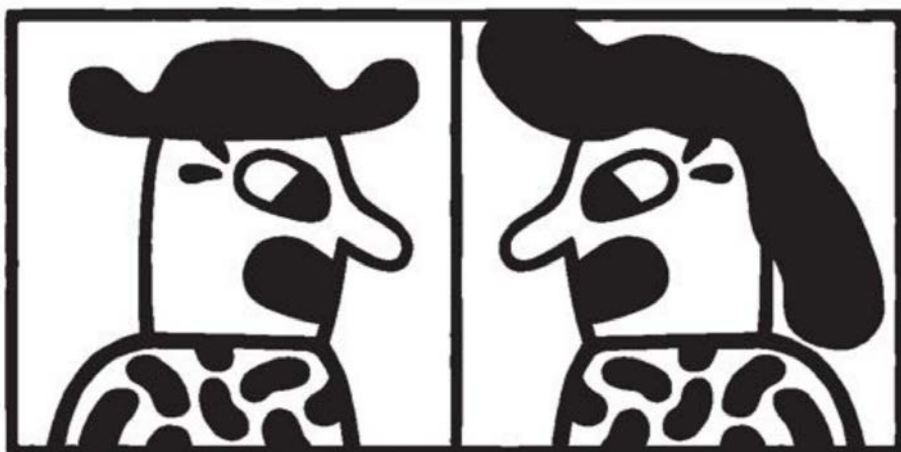
location with a 20-barrel brewhouse on SLO's south side on Higuera Street. From that pitch-perfect pale to a true-to-style German schwarzbier to the not-actually-authentic-but-currently-fashionable salt'n'lime Mexican lager, CCB is a brewery for the ages (those being past and present). But what of the brewery's future?

"The opening of the new brewery is going to allow us to do two really important things," noted Gough. "First, it will allow us to brew our most popular beers with better economies of scale and in greater volume. This will allow us to expand our distribution and get more CCB beer in people's hands." For LA readers, however, note that CCB is 100 percent self-distributed and currently doesn't have any plans enter LA yet. Their first move will be into the Santa Barbara market, which

at least is 100 miles closer. Gough added, "Also, by pulling all the big-sellers off the production schedule at the old location, we will be able to unleash a ton of new and creative experimental beers. I have a bunch of ideas that I've been wanting to explore but it can be hard to find room in the production schedule to fit everything in. With the new brewery online, the old pub is going to really be able to run wild with creativity."

If that includes an imperial chai ale, so be it!

Brian Yaeger is the author of Red, White, and Brew and contributed to the Oxford Companion to Beer. If he's not 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.



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Brendon Gough and friends

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COVER STORY

FROM BEACHWOOD TO SUNSET BEACH: IAN MCCALL GETS RIIPED

by DANIEL DRENNON

The California craft beer scene leads the country with over 900 breweries and we are spoiled by how many of our breweries are brewing world class beer. And while the best inspire a fervor among beer fans for brewmasters with rock star-status names, there are #2 brewers in the boots who are critical to making those beers exceptional. While you know the brewmaster's name, you may have never heard of that vital assistant brewer.

For five of his seven years at Beachwood BBQ & Brewing, Ian McCall worked as Julian Shrago's assistant brewer (the first two he was a bartender). During that seven-year run, Beachwood racked up a ridiculous number of World Beer Cup and Great American Beer Festival medals. McCall absorbed knowledge, developed world-class brewing skills himself, and mastered his craft...literally.

As every pupil must eventually leave their mentor and take on their own destiny, in April of this year, McCall accepted the position of Head Brewer at Riip Beer Company in nearby Sunset Beach. I wanted to put him on the cover in May but we decided we would wait until he had dialed in the Riip beers on a system that was new to him. Within three months, it was clear the beers had gone from really good to simply great. I sat down with McCall at his new home away from home to ask how he did it.

DRENNON: *What was the first beer you had that made you go, "wow!" and what year?*

MCCALL: Two of them actually; First, Hop Rod Rye from Bear Republic in 2003. Long before I began to understand the use of hops, or rye, or even malt, for that matter, this beer really did it for me. I had a long love affair with many beers from Northern California, but Hop Rod Rye was my go to for a long time. Second, and this one is more one of my favorite memories of a beer, I'll never forget my first sips of Chimay Grande Reserve, straight from the bottle, while waiting in line to enter the festival grounds, watching the sun rise over High Sierra Music Festival in 2005.

I know your industry career started at Brewbakers in Huntington Beach in 2003. What was the initial job, what made you want it, and how did it evolve over the six years you were there?

I walked in to Brewbakers one day on a recommendation from a friend. It was on my way home from Golden West College. As soon as I walked in I was smitten with the idea that I could brew my own beer and I told Dennis Midden (the owner) shortly thereafter that he would soon hire me to work for him. After a few weeks of frequenting Brewbakers, drinking a lot of beer, getting to know Dennis and the locals, and insisting that he hire me, the day finally came when his assistant/brewer quit in a huff and I was in.



Riip Beer in Sunset Beach

Photo Courtesy of Ryan Rasmussen

There was no real job description, nor was there a real full-time staff. I was hurriedly taught how to produce wort on the Brew-on-Premise equipment and was quickly expected to teach the public how to brew their own batches. I eventually took on the role of General Manager and oversaw countless batches of beer. We built a solid and fun team of guys (including my brother) and rocked it out. Some days we would brew up to 18 batches in 6 ½ barrel kettles. Brewbakers was a formative time for me and my brewing career because we could brew anything we wanted, anytime we wanted and use new or interesting ingredients without any concern for the cost of a ruined batch. I grew up there, and even met my wife Lisa while teaching her and her friends how to brew.

At what point did you decide, "I want to be a professional brewer."

After my time at Brewbakers came to an end, I walked away from the brewing industry and went on to pursue other interests. I didn't believe that being a professional brewer was in my future for quite a long time. However, when I was hired on to work at the Beachwood Brewpub in Long Beach I quickly realized that I sure as hell was willing to do whatever it takes to try.

When and how did you meet Gabe Gordon, the owner of Beachwood BBQ in Seal Beach, and how did you come to work for him?

Gabe and I met during the early years of Beachwood BBQ. Not long after opening the restaurant, he had an issue with his bread supplier and contacted us at Brewbakers to supply him with pretzel and onion buns for his sandwiches. We became fast friends and I have great memories of those early days when I would sit at one of his three bar stools before the restaurant opened and talk all things "microbrews" or when they would shut down the restaurant after closing and we would continue talking about beer and everything else late into the night.

After I left Brewbakers, I went back to construction jobs and finished my Bachelor's Degree at CSUF. I began homebrewing to fulfill my dreams of brewing beer again. I sincerely missed the industry and jumped at the opportunity to work for Gabe and Lena when I heard they were opening a brewpub. I interviewed with Justin Evelyn and Kyle Crabb and got the gig...bartender, but I knew that was my opening. To ensure I got the job, I arrived at the interview, which was held in the parking lot behind Beachwood SB, dressed to the nines in my suit and tie. They told me I was



Ryan Hopkins, Ian McCall, and Daniel Drennon

Photo Credit: Fernando Gomez

considerably overdressed; I was the only candidate who arrived in a suit. Many showed up in their swimsuits, hoping to hit the beach after.

How long were you there and what did you learn during that period?

I started at Beachwood BBQ in Seal Beach in April 2011 before the brewpub opened, training as a bartender. I was going to miss much of the pre-opening staff training due to our wedding. We honeymooned in Europe, returned July 4th, 2011, and we opened Beachwood Brewing and BBQ in Long Beach the next day, July 5th. It was an exciting time. Craft beer was skyrocketing and the Los Angeles scene was just taking off. My biggest takeaways from my time bartending are the friendships I made, the community we built and the insane amount of beer knowledge I gained just by being a part of the best beer bar and brewpub in the world.

Speaking of that, you got to witness Beachwood BBQ emerge as one of the most revered beer bars in the country from its origin as a small BBQ joint. From your cool vantage point behind the bar, how and why did it happen?

Everyone cared SO MUCH about it!!! It didn't start with me, but long before. Not only is Gabe a great businessman, but he hired and inspired a tremendously motivated and caring staff and shared his passions openly with all who were around him. We were excited to go to work, taste new beers and I was especially excited about sharing my new-found knowledge with all of our awesome customers.

Gordon meets Julian Shrago, aerospace engineer and award-winning homebrewer, and they decide to open Beachwood BBQ & Brewing in downtown Long Beach. How did that whole thing happen and how did you end up being hired as Shrago's assistant brewer?

I did not know Julian well before he and Gabe opened in Long Beach. I distinctly remember sitting at the bar at Seal Beach and tasting Julian's home brews, each bottled with its own unique label. Gabe would open a bottle and pour taster samples for the regulars, exclaiming about how well-made Julian's beers were. While I was bartending in LB, I could not shake my desire to become a brewer



Ian McCall and Ryan Hopkins, Co-Founder of Riip Photo Credit: Fernando Gomez

and work with Julian. As I said before, I had homebrewed a bit after I left Brewbakers but I decided to kick it up and learn as much as I could.

I began buying books on beer and studying when I was not at work. I enrolled in the Siebel's Online Concise Course in Intermediate Brewing and upon completion I began to look for a brewing gig, even if it possibly meant leaving Beachwood. Lucky for me, I didn't leave Beachwood and Julian offered to let me apprentice with him when I wasn't bartending. I was so stoked to be learning the ropes. I would close the bar, crash on a friend's couch in Long Beach, start early with Julian, sleep in my truck after the brewery shift and close the bar again before finally going home. Those were crazy days but worth every single minute of lost sleep. I finally felt like I was doing what I was meant to be doing.

It wasn't long after I began working with Julian that we won our first Brewpub and Brewpub Brewer of the year award at GABF. My wife and I had just had our first child and I did not attend GABF that year. I remember listening to the live stream of the awards ceremony from the hospital and celebrating quietly (but ecstatically) by myself while my son had his hearing test.

Did any of you have any reasonable expectation going into it that Beachwood Brewing was going to explode on the national (even international) craft beer scene and end up winning two Best Mid-Sized Brewpub, one Best Large-Sized Brewpub in the country, and a boatload of medals at the Great American Beer Festival (GABF)?

(On top of that, you win Best Brewpub in the world at World Beer Cup at 2016 and likely would have repeated in 2018 but the Brewer's Association decided not to give that distinction to any breweries of brewpubs this year)

I think the reasonable answer is NO. I knew that Julian had been producing world-class beers but I had no idea what I had luckily stumbled into.

Have the beers gotten better over the first seven years or were they great right of the gate?

The answer is YES...they have been constantly improving. One of the many lessons I learned from Julian and I still strive to master every single day is the ability to enjoy my beers but also be honest and critical about where the beer can be improved or where a recipe maybe fell short of expectations. Like a good chef, Julian taught me to consider all ingredients, from the water profile, to the malt, hops or yeast. I loved the discussions we would have about the beers and how to improve them regularly.

What else have you learned from Shrago?

I have learned countless things from Julian, from the brewhouse to the cellar. I can hear his voice in my head every day encouraging me to "slow down and think about it". He taught me procedural awareness, encouraged my meticulousness, inspired me to continue making better beer, and to "rock out with Maibock out!"

What have you learned from Gabe Gordon over these years?

(McCALL GETS RIIPED continued)

Where do I start? Gabe has taught me so much about work and life. I admire his dedication to his work and his family. He was always willing to answer any question I had about the business or to open his books to show me how his numbers worked. Gabe taught me that success does not come easy, it takes long hours, hard work and commitment to see it through. I feel that I owe a great deal to Gabe and Julian for the countless hours of conversation and education.

How, when and why did Beachwood's expansion to Huntington Beach happen?

In early 2016, Beachwood acquired the current production facility as Beach City Brewing was shuttering. We were at capacity in Long Beach and still had much more demand for our beer. When I caught wind that Beach City was entertaining buyers, I brought the news to Gabe and Julian and left the ball in their court. The rest is history.

How did that change your role and that change help you to become an even better brewer?

The addition of Huntington Beach was a big change for Beachwood Brewing. I was promoted to Lead Brewer and was placed in charge of production at Long Beach.

What are the key differences between being an assistant brewer managed by the brewmaster and becoming the head brewer and managing other brewers?

Assistant brewers, shift brewers, cellarman get to clock out at the end of their shifts. Granted some of the best, or most committed, definitely take their work home with them mentally, but as the Head Brewer (Brewmaster, if you may) the job never ends. I can attest to this in my own experience and I know that the commitment of many head brewers goes well beyond the work week.

Let's finally get to the impetus for this cover story. How, when and why did you decide to take the Head Brewer position at Riip Beer Company in

your hometown of Huntington Beach?

Riip Beer Company was a regular stop of mine during my drive home from LB to HB, I would stop in almost weekly and was a big supporter of all the previous brewers (Andrew Moy, Trevor Walls, Brendan Megowan and Derek Testerman) and I still keep in touch with them all. I had been informally offered the job for a while, but it was very difficult to leave Beachwood. I finally accepted the position in early 2018 because it was an opportunity to apply what I had learned from Beachwood and have the freedom to create my own recipes. And, as you mentioned, Riip Beer Co is located in my hometown, close to my family and my children's schools. Plus, the view is almost unparalleled.

As a decorated professional brewer, what was your assessment of Riip's beers over their first few years as they also had enjoyed some critical acclaim, in particular snagging a GABF silver medal for Super Cali IPA back in 2016?

I have always been a fan of their style and more importantly, their brand. When Riip started, they were on a 3.5bbl Stout system, and Moy was creating fun and delicious beers. Moy was at the helm when Riip picked up its first and only GABF medal (silver) for Super Cali. No system is without its downfalls and it takes a competent brewer to overcome those and make clean beer. Trevor came on during the transition from 3bbl system to 10bbl. I was always a fan of Trevor's beers from his time at Pizza Port on and I know he will continue to make great beer in his new endeavor (Brewery X in Anaheim). Derek Testerman, previously from Beach City Brewing and Gunwhale Ales, was hired on in a temporary capacity until he finalized his plans to move back east and open his own brewery.

Riip Beer Company has built a great reputation in the community and has consistently overcome brewer turnover to produce some of the OC's favorite hoppy beer. I am very excited to bring a higher level of consistency and to be able to share my knowledge and experience with our growing team.



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Anything else you think you can bring to the Riip table that hasn't been there in the past?

I think that I provide a solid foundation of experience and organization on top of which we can grow and continue to brew solid, hopefully award-winning, beers for years to come. As an HB resident and local myself, I already have deep ties within the community. Riip attracts people from all walks of life who love enjoying the beach, drinking good beer and hanging out with close friends. I hope that I can bring stability to the team, vision for our future and inspiration to drive us to get there. We have many plans for what the future of Riip Beer Co looks like and I plan on seeing those through to completion.

I was already a big fan of Riip beer before you came on board, but I have to say it seems the beers have gotten even better in your first three months – cleaner, crisper and more flavorful. What changes and/or improvements have you been able to implement?

The biggest change I believe I have made has been to utilize the brite beer tank as often as possible and move away from “unitank” brewing when possible. I am a huge fan of clean, clarified, crisp hoppy beers. I have placed a lot of attention on improving and perfecting my cellaring practices.

Although Riip already had a vast list of unique beers to choose from, we decided to maintain and dial in only four of the most well-known beers: Jetty Water Blonde Ale, Super Cali IPA, Dan K IPA, and Raider Bob DIPa. All other beers have been and will continue to be new and different.

The ownership has been supportive of all of my ideas for improving our equipment, CIP and sanitization practices and serving practices. During

the first few months here, we have overhauled all of our fermenters and our brite tank, replacing old, worn-out or damaged gaskets, and I changed our procedures to ensure complete cleaning and sanitizing of all surfaces.

For those familiar with Riip Beer Co and our taproom, but have not see it in a while, I encourage you to come down and check it out again. We have made substantial changes to our tap room, increased the size of the space, we updated our draft system, added roll-up doors to provide a beautiful view of the ocean, and we are putting the finishing touches on our new patio.

In the past, Riip was a haven for Hopheads, having a taplist that was nearly exclusively hoppy beers. What is your plan to diversify the taplist while still protecting Riip's love affair with IPAs?

Our love for hops is here to stay. If anything, I am actively trying to expand our obsession by introducing new hop varieties and styles. The previous brewers dabbled in a few different styles, but I feel that our current production schedule will allow me to experiment even more with new and interesting ingredients. The taplist already has more diversity than it has seen in quite a while; e.g. Krimson Killa' Red Ale, Pacifist Pelican Brown Ale, Firstmeal Oatmeal Stout with Portola coffee. I have a Belgian beer in tank and plan on brewing a couple more.

What is your position on West Coast-style versus New England versus now the new craze, Brut?

In our current “craft beer” climate, I think both styles have their place. It probably comes as no surprise that I love West Coast-style IPAs, but I also have had many “New England-style” or hazy IPAs that have made



Riip Crawlers

Photo Courtesy of Ryan Rasmussen

me appreciate and enjoy that style. My wife, who has always been a West Coast hophead, has taken to the hazy beers and we enjoy many of them together.

I sincerely hope that Brut IPA is not just a flash in the pan. I feel that if the Milkshake IPA is the extreme extension of a New England Style,

then the Brut IPA is an extension of the West Coast IPA; higher dry-hopping rate, lower IBUs, extremely dry. You can expect me to continue to play with this style.

Will Riip seek out collaboration opportunities with other breweries and, if so, why? (McCALL GETS RIIPED continued on page 17)

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Josh Banta of Riip Beer Co.
Photo Courtesy of Ryan Rasmussen
(McCALL GETS RIIPED continued)

You better believe it. To me, collaborations are the natural progression of networking and friendships built in our community. Although Riip Beer Co is basically the furthest brewery away from any freeway in OC, we plan on being a part of the fabric of the OC beer scene. We are planning a few as I write this.

Ryan Rasmussen, aka “Big Ryan,” is the auteur behind Riip, himself a brewer and author of many of Riip’s recipes. How are you meshing and working together as a team? Are you free to develop your own recipes and makes changes as you see fit in the brewery?

Ryan and I get along great. We go back to my days at Brewbakers. The entire team of owner/investors has been very supportive and open to whatever I want to do. We have already (in the

last three months) made significant changes to the tasting room, brewery, and overall customer experience that everyone involved is stoked on.

The team at Riip Beer Co is more than the ownership though. We have a great tasting room staff... shout-outs to Connor, Jimmie, Hope, Tony, Josh, Nichole, Mitch and Skip! They are excited about our future and trajectory. Its fun to make beer when I know that it will be represented by passionate and fun people.

Do you see Riip expanding production anytime soon and, if so, will it be canning and/or bottling?

Yes, we are actively working on increasing production. When we get to the point that we decide to package beer again it will most likely be in can form. I don’t have a timeline for packaging at the moment.

Where do you see Riip in five years? Ten years? Do you have any particular philosophy and goals?

I hope that we can continue to grow at a steady pace, opening small taprooms, possibly another brewery, and serving our local communities. One thing I love about Riip is the vibe that has been built and is sustained by our awesome community. Replicating that can be difficult but if we stay grounded, true to our roots and focus on serving the community we will be successful wherever we end up. My biggest goal is to prove to my children that they can chase their dreams and succeed. I plan on doing whatever it takes to be a good role model for them.

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

Determined.



Riip Beer and Delivery Trolley

Photo Courtesy of Ryan Rasmussen

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SMOKE MOUNTAIN

DESTINATION BREWERY: SMOKE MOUNTAIN

by ERIN PETERS

Here's to the corkscrew – a useful key to unlock the storehouse of wit, the treasury of laughter, the front door of fellowship, and the gate of pleasant folly.” – W.E.P French

The French have a phrase for good drinking. As we drove up the windy avocado lined rode's, I could tell this wasn't your average brewery. We were in store for some “bonne boisson.”

With views that stretch from the peaks above Lake Casitas to the coast of Santa Barbara, this very small nano-brewery takes advantage of the land and the seasons to produce one-of-a-kind beers.

The idea was solidified at a Belgium plaza during the owner's honeymoon in 2013. After parking atop the 140-acre property, one of their massive and relaxed dogs sauntered up to meet us. If I lived with this view, I'd be relaxed, too.



Smoke Mountain Chenin Blanc grapes

Photo Credit: Erin Peters

Renaissance man Randy Siple founded the mountain and his son, Edward Darren helped install the water system, the roads and just about everything there. Randy also planted a very small vineyard years ago amidst the lemon groves, consisting of Chenin Blanc and Pinot Noir.

Edward Darren's father passed away in 2016, so he has taken on much of the responsibility of maintaining the property.

“My dad was a project guy...and one of the things he got into in the late 90s, early 2,000s was wine making.”

Edward Darren Siple studied Wine & Viticulture at Cal Poly San Louis Obispo and graduated in 2011. The young entrepreneur concentrated in Oenology. Simultaneously during his college years, he dabbled in homebrewing.

“I went to the home brew shop at Doc's Cellars and I remember I got my first home brewing kit when I was 18 or 19 and I was like, you just buy all the ingredients? You don't have to be 21 to do this? The guys [said] ‘No, I'm just selling you grain and yeast and hops, so go for it.’”

And he did. Edward Darren started homebrewing nearly every weekend, while getting his degree in winemaking. Must have been a popular guy.

Today, Edward Darren – just 30 years old - and wife, Jill, have taken it to even another level by growing their

own hops and grain in Paso Robles. That's where you'll find their main grape source as well. They own a 55-acre property, with eight wine varieties.

“I did it that way so I can feel out which varieties are really going to shine the best in our little micro climate up there, so I can continue to plant more varieties as we go.”

Along with six acres of grapevines, Smoke Mountain plants beer barley and is able to harvest their own grain. Because their Paso property is on an old dairy, which was set up with



Edward Darren Siple

Photo Credit: Erin Peters

pasture and irrigation, he's able to grow their own. Last year, they planted and harvested about 4,000 pounds of two row barley. They get it malted at Colorado Malting Company, which is also does specialty roasting. Rounding out their wine and beer affair, Edward Darren uses one and twice used French oak barrels from wineries in Paso Robles and Santa Cruz.

The couple is in control. They control how it's harvested, stored, fermented, aged, and bottled.

They even helped fire crew that thankfully saved the property during the Thomas Fire. Edward Darren joked that at least he was able to finally get rid of an RV trailer that had been taking up space for years.

“It's one of those things, I'll deal with it later. Then after the fires, ‘oh hey! Look at that! It's pretty much gone now.’”

Back at the Rincon Mountain property above Carpentaria, you'll find Meyer lemons and macadamia nut trees, which of course are also used in their unique beers.

The lemons were an active participant in making the brewery's Saison de Citron, a Spring release brewed with black peppercorn and the macadamia nuts played a big role in their Macadamia Nut Coconut Milk Stout.

While still very small, they continue to grow and will offer more styles and recipes, with – no surprise – a heavy influence on European styles.

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Smoke Mountain beer to come

Photo Credit: Erin Peters

Edward Darren and head brewer, Kim Leonard produce three “wine-sized” bottles of beer which are specially crafted for club members and delivered to their door step. But I HIGHLY suggest picking up the beers at their pick up parties.

Their next private Pick Up Party is **Saturday, August 18th, from 1-5 pm.**

“We don’t really do standards, if you will. We take the inspiration of the style and then try to hold true to that base beer style, but then also change it up a little bit with different ingredients that we’re adding,” he explained.

Today, their two-year old brew system consists of two 3 and ½ barrel systems, side by side. Staying consistent with their ‘we do just about everything’

mantra, Edward Darren and his crew built the frame for their direct fire system. Wouldn’t you know it? His father was also proficient in metal fabrication.

“Right now, this is a great way to grow into the brewery. We started off doing very small batches. About ½ barrel batches off of our smaller system. This allows us to start doing more distribution as well.”

Edward Darren planted a small hopyard near the vineyard in Paso. The 1/8 of an acre produces several different varieties of hops like Chinook, Nugget, Pacific Gem, Centennial, Columbus, Cascade and Magnum. Similar to the wine varietals, Darren is testing to see what hop varietals will work best in wine country.

“One thing that is very important in making wine is where your fruit comes from, the terroir, and the idea behind, the little differences and uniqueness that you can get out of your fruit. So, understanding that, I wanted to bring that aspect into the brewery.”

In two to three years, Smoke Mountain hopes to be a full estate brewery,

where all of their beers will be made with 100% of their own ingredients – grown, harvested and brewed by Smoke Mountain.

It’s been said that beauty is truth, and truth is beauty. As you pass through their old timey feeling tasting room, through the weathered wooden doors, you’ll understand why.

Erin Peters is a beer writer that has been enticing beer drinkers for a decade. Focusing on Southern California, she’s uniquely knowledgeable, having lived in seven So Cal cities including San Diego and Los Angeles. She’s since returned home to Ventura County. She is the founder of thebeergoddess.com and her twitter feed is @TheBeerGoddess.



Sometimes Your Beer Needs an Umbrella
Photo Credit: Erin Peters



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BREWER'S CORNER

CAMARADERIE, COMMUNITY, & COLLABORATION

by KEITH SHOWALTER

We scrub floors and tanks, we turn multiple brews in one day, often in the heat, cursing the tri-clamps that won't seat properly as we are awkwardly bent under or around tank legs. We bump our heads, scrape our knuckles. We drag around hoses, endlessly it seems some days, and those damn things always, ALWAYS will get caught on something to slow you down. Stuck mashes, boil overs, long hours, the list goes on and on. It's easy to say to yourself sometimes, "what the hell did I get myself into?!"

I'm speaking, of course, from a brewer's point of view in this industry, but I am sure that all of those in sales, management, and other facets of the beer business have their bad days as well. But if you were to mention to any of us the possibility of doing something outside of the beer realm, we would look at you as if you were crazy. Granted, there are people who do not make it, who don't realize the struggles and the sacrifices that come along with a life in beer that may seem more glorious than it actually is.

It is more than just a great independent beer that makes this industry the best in the world. This industry has



Keith Showalter

sustained itself and has gone through tremendous growth because of the relationships we have forged with each other, and our undying willingness to help out our brothers and sisters openly. Whether it's lending a bag of malt to the folks down the street, a yeast pitch to the brewers across town, or handing down used barrels. And with consumers becoming more and more aware of some corporations predatory and unethical practices in the market, we have a duty to uphold and support the small businesses and communities around us. We saw these aggressive tactics most notably with Wicked Weed, and now Beavertown's acquisition by Heineken. 10 Barrel is attempting to open a spot in SD and Golden Road attempts to undermine true independent craft through media. All of which were and are rightfully met with sharp criticism.

Part of what keeps me motivated is knowing that we have such a large impact on influencing the way people think about the morals of a business, and the way that it reflects on a community, and the effect that it has on it. It is absolutely vital to maintain these close relationships to prevent any ill will.

We also do this by collaborating on beers together. Everywhere you look you will see a collaboration between two or even three breweries. Sometimes for a specific cause, other times it's just for the hell of it! Just good friends getting together, doing something that they love, to share with people who are just as passionate about beer, and more often than not, their community as well.

Now, I know that all of this isn't news to anybody. We are all fully aware of our ties within the beer culture, the challenges we face, and the impact our industry has on the people and places around us. But 15 or so years ago, none of us could have predicted the incredible growth and success that we are seeing today. In an age where competition for taps and shelf space

is as heated as ever, as well as talks of tariffs, and the many headaches that come along with distribution, it's easy to forget why we got into this business in the first place.

The most satisfying part of my day is when I stop for a second and take a look around the tap room. Couples, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, friends of all kinds, smiling and laughing, sharing beer that they love, with people that they love. So, fellow brewers. Whenever you find yourself ready to tear your hair (or beard) out, just remember that people truly and deeply appreciate what we do. And on top of that, I do too. As your brewer brother, I always got your back! Shout out to all my beer people that wouldn't trade this life for anything.



Keith Showalter

Keith Showalter is the new Head Brewer at Wick's Brewing in Riverside. Previously, Showalter brewed at The Lost Abbey, Garage, Foothills, and Stone. Keith is an outspoken advocate for independent beer.

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beachwoodbbq.com

Beachwood BBQ

131 ½ Main St, Seal Beach
beachwoodbbq.com

Brewyard Beer Company

906 Western Ave, Glendale
brewyardbeercompany.com

Chapman Crafted Beer

123 N Cypress St, Old Towne Orange
chapmancrafted.beer

Cismontane Brewing Company

1409 E Warner Suite C, Santa Ana
cismontanebrewing.com

Claremont Craft Ales

1420 N Claremont Blvd #204c,
Claremont
claremontcraftales.com

El Segundo Brewing

140 Main St, El Segundo
elsegundobrewing.com

Figueroa Mountain Brewing - Westlake Village

30770 Russell Ranch Rd,
Westlake Village
FigMtnBrew.com

Firestone Walker - The Propagator

3205 Washington Blvd, Marina Del Rey
firestonebeer.com

HopSaint Brewing Company

5160 W 190th St, Torrance
hopsaint.com

Ironfire Brewing Co.

42095 Zevo Dr Suite #1, Temecula
ironfirebrewing.com

Karl Strauss Brewing Co.

2390 E Orangewood Ave #100, Anaheim
karlstrauss.com

Karl Strauss Brewing Co.

600 Wilshire Blvd #100, Los Angeles
karlstrauss.com

Liberation Brewing

3630 Atlantic Ave, Long Beach
liberationbrewing.com

Mikkeller

330 W Olympic Blvd, Los Angeles
mikkellerbar.com/la

Naja's Place

154 International Boardwalk,
Redondo Beach
najasplace.com

Riley's

5331 E 2nd St, Long Beach
rileyson2nd.com

Skyland Ale Works

1869 Pomona Road E & F, Corona
skylandaleworks.com

Smog City - Steelcraft

3768 Long Beach Boulevard #110,
Long Beach
steelcraftlb.com/smog-city-brewing

Smog City Brewing

1901 Del Amo Blvd, Torrance
smogcitybrewing.com

State Brewing Company

1237 W 134th St, Gardena
facebook.com/statebrewingco

Strand Brewing

2201 Dominguez St, Torrance
strandbrewing.com

Timeless Pints

3671 Industry Ave C1, Lakewood
timelesspints.com

Unsung Brewing Co.

500 S Anaheim Blvd, Anaheim
unsungbrewing.com

Verdugo West

156 W Verdugo Ave, Burbank
verdugowestbrewing.com

Ximix Craft Exploration

13723 1/2 Harvard Pl, Gardena
ximixcraft.com

Zymurgy Brew Works & Tasting Room

22755 Hawthorne Blvd, Torrance
zymurgybrewworks.com

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