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CALIFORNIA CRUSH



2018 Great American Beer Festival Awards Ceremony

Photo Credit: © Brewers Association

By Tomm Carroll

Yet again, the Golden State led the pack at this year's Great American Beer Festival, mining Gold, Silver and Bronze in the Rocky Mountain State's capital city at the fest's awards ceremony on September 22. Out of more than 8,600 entered beers (including the Pro-Am and Collaboration entries) from 49 states (Mississippi sat this one out) and the District of Columbia, California breweries took home 73 medals...

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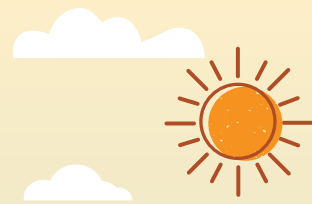


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PINTS & QUOTES

HIGH CULTURE MEETS BREW CULTURE

by JOHN M. VERIVE

Los Angeles, even with the development of our homegrown beer culture, plays second fiddle to San Diego and other smaller metropolises such as Denver and Portland when it comes to craft beer, but there's one space where LA's cultural cache is indisputable. The Los Angeles Philharmonic is considered the most well endowed, most exciting and most groundbreaking orchestral organization in the country, and this October marks the group's centennial season. The LA Phil wants you to raise a toast to celebrate 100 years, not with a glass of champagne, but with a brut of another kind: A brut IPA brewed in collaboration with Los Angeles Ale Works.

"It's a beer years in the making," says Francis Michelle Lopez, Executive Director of the LA County Brewers Guild. Lopez first established a connection with the marketing department of LA Phil while working for Golden Road Brewing in the pre-buyout days. Three years ago when she took on the Director role at the LABG, she developed the relationship with the Phil as a way to expand the impact of LA's independent breweries. The partnership led to LABG member breweries featured during the LA Phil's Casual Friday series. Offering approachable and progressive programming, and an after concert reception showcasing local craft beer, the Casual Friday series was a success for both the Phil and the LABG. It even spawned a YouTube series — Hop Into Casual Fridays

featuring orchestra musicians and Lopez demystifying orchestral music and craft beer.

The idea for a collaboration beer had floated around for a while, but it wasn't until LA Beer Week 2018 that a plan was put in motion. The eye-catching cans of this year's Unity, prominently featuring City Hall and brewed by LA Ale Works impressed the Phil's marketers. Once the homebrewers in the orchestra had a chance to meet the LA Ale Works crew at a Casual Friday event, they knew they'd found a perfect partner for the project.

Blending beer culture with the tony LA Phil scene appealed to LAAW founders Kristofor Barnes and Andrew Fowler, and talking with the enthusiastic homebrewers within the orchestra convinced them to make room on the brewing schedule. Barnes, who played trombone in the USC marching band, is proud of his homebrew roots and dedicated to keeping LA's homebrewing scene vibrant and engaged with the local beer culture. "I have a really fun time working with homebrewers," Barnes says, "this beer really was a team effort."

A pair of homebrewing LA Phil musicians took time from their busy practice schedules to visit the Hawthorne brewery where they not only pitched-in for the brew day, but helped design the recipe. Christopher Still, the Second Trumpet in the orchestra, was shocked by how hands-



Christopher Still, Kip Barnes, David Rejano Cantero Photo Credit: LA Ale Works

on their experience was. "We sat down and talked about the culture of our two organizations," he says. Style and ingredient ideas were bantered about and an idea hatched. Soon the musicians were doughing-in on LA Ale Work's 10-barrel SS Brewtech system. "I took gravity readings!" he says. Principal Trombone David Rejano Cantero grained-out using his trombone. At the end of the brew day, dressed in tuxedos (and brewer's boots of course) the musicians switched from stainless steel kettles to polished brass instruments. Barnes, a trombonist, sat in and the trio played encouraging tunes to the freshly fermenting wort. (Still would return days later to add a dry hop charge.)

"I felt a connection with LA Ale Works because their vibe of exploration and experimentation is exactly what

we try for at LA Phil," Still says. He emphasizes that the mission behind the 'Phil is to take the mystery and pretension out of the orchestra. "We don't play 'classical music'," he says. "We play orchestral music." It's a distinction the musicians take seriously, and they want Angelenos to understand it isn't (all) about 17th century composers. There's great breadth and vitality in the programs every season with an emphasis on expanding the definition of what an orchestra is and defying the expectations of what it can do. Still equates this with the experimental spirit of craft beer — an industry that's adept at transforming the staid and established into the exciting and cutting edge.

"This was a chance to get out of our comfort zone and make something



unique that shows what LA is all about,” Fowler says. The team decided on the trendy brut IPA because it “harmonizes with the LA Phil’s black-tie culture,” and the style hasn’t yet been fully defined or refined. Brut is approachable enough for the uninitiated but novel enough for a beer aficionado, and can be exciting to both. To further connect it with the LA Phil milestone celebration, the beer is hopped with, what else, Centennial hops. A small dose of local citrus zest

was added for accent and to further tie the ale to its environment. “It’s got a California soul,” says Still.

LA Ale Works has experimented with a handful of the nouveau IPAs, known for their clean, very dry finish and hoppy aromatics with little bitterness, but no one has yet dialed-in what exactly a brut IPA is. “That’s what makes it fun,” Fowler says. “They’re enjoyable to drink because you get to track the style as it develops.” It’s

something new and exciting, but also something that isn’t as challenging as a straight West Coast hop bomb or as polarizing as a hazy/juice or milkshake IPA.

The brew, LA Phil 100, will be available in cans featuring the iconic Walt Disney Concert Hall at special events and concerts beginning in October. And it likely won’t be the last of the collaboration brews. LA Ale Works will again work with the homebrewing LA Phil musicians for a second beer highlighting the ‘Phil’s summer home at the Hollywood Bowl will be brewed in the first half of 2019. After that, Lopez teases, we’ll just have to wait and see what’s next. Perhaps iconoclast conductor Gustavo Dudamel will lend his baton to a collaboration between LA’s boundary-smashing orchestra and one of LA’s innovative breweries.

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.



David Rejano Cantero, Christopher Still, Kip Barnes Photo Credit: LA Ale Works



LA Phil 100 Photo Credit: LA Ale Works

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PROFILE

TEN QUESTIONS WITH CRANKY CAMERON

by DANIEL DRENNON

Cameron Collins, along with his wife Tiffany, are the co-founders/co-owners of Brew Ha Ha Productions, based in scenic San Clemente. If you are a craft beer fan in the greater LA region, and especially if you are straight up OC, you have likely been to one of their festivals.

A decade ago, on a beer trip south to Stone in Escondido, the couple along with mother-in-law Carrie James (now retired) recognized the OC had no craft beer festivals. Ultimately, they came up with Brew Ha Ha Productions. From that inauspicious beginning, they have become the premier craft beer, and now beer/music festival promoter in the Golden State.

I sat down with Cameron to ask how it went from idea to iconic.

DRENNON: *Right off the bat, let's hear where your nickname "Cranky" comes from since the few times we've hung out you are nothing but unbridled enthusiasm and positive energy.*

COLLINS: I used to race triathlons every distance from sprint to Ironman until I hurt my back in 2008 at Vineman in Sonoma CA. I was into beer at that time (yes, we always celebrated at Russian River after our races up there) but my primary passion was certainly competing. When my doctors told me they wanted to fuse my back and that I would never run or ride again, my passions naturally leaned toward craft beer! My Instagram name was "camathlon" and given the fact that I traded in my triathlete physique for that of bearded beer drinking woodsman, I needed a new handle. I asked Tiffany what I should change it to and apparently I was being a bit grouchy on that particular day, so she said "Cranky Cameron!" It's just sorta stuck ever since.

DRENNON: *I know you've told me the story, but please share with our readers where the "Brew Ha Ha" name came from.*

COLLINS: We were sitting in a booth at Oggi's in Mission Viejo in 2009 when we finally decided to get off our



Cameron Collins (BHHP)
Photo Courtesy of Brew Ha Ha Productions

butts and answer the call that no one else seemed to be willing to...and that was bring a quality craft beer event to Orange County. We were thinking of various concepts for the event and we thought...everyone hires bands to entertain attendees at these types of events, so what if we brought in comedy and called it the "OC BREW HA HA"!?!? After bouncing that idea off of various friends and breweries we decided it probably wouldn't work... yet...the concept was dropped for then... but the name stuck!

DRENNON: *One of the coolest things, at least from a brewery perspective, is that you pay for the beer at your festivals whereas the vast majority of fests ask breweries to donate the beer because the fest is supporting some charity with a percentage of the receipts. Did you always pay? Please address that sensitive issue and why you pay.*

COLLINS: Firstly we still, almost always have a charity partner that we work with and make donations to regardless of us purchasing the beer. In recent years we've grown a lot as an organization and it's been important to me to do everything we can to support the craft beer community so buying the beer for these events, especially as we've expanded, was really an easy decision. If you say you "support craft beer and the breweries who brew them" then buy their beer.

It's not really a sensitive subject at all for me... there was a time that donations were common for all beer festivals... today, it doesn't have to be.

I estimate we'll buy over a million dollars in craft beer this year from independently owned breweries and I feel like the breweries we work with really appreciate it!

DRENNON: *I believe you always incorporated live music even in the early days, but now you have upped your game to a national level with critically acclaimed beer and music festivals such as Beer X, Driftwood, Sabroso, Scallywag, and Punk in*

Dublic. How and when did that evolution occur?

COLLINS: We saw the over-saturation of beer festivals in their traditional format expanding throughout the country in 2015 so we were looking for ways to define and set ourselves apart... being the best wasn't good enough anymore... Other promoters were popping up everywhere, over promising and under delivering... there was some crappy event happening in every town, on every weekend... It was and frankly is a bit out of control. It was time to raise the bar.

A company called Synergy Global Entertainment (SGE), owned by my now good friend John Reese approached us to do an event with them at Irvine Meadows called Cali Uncorked... this was a Craft Beer, Reggae and Wine festival that would later be moved to Oak Canyon Park where we had done the OC Brew Ha Ha for years. That year we had 200+ beers being served, bands like Reblution performing with a comedy segment with famous comedians like David Koechner ("I love you Ron Burgundy" from the movie Anchorman) and many others making attendees laugh their butts off. The show was rad and our companies worked surprisingly well together... we shared a passion for exceeding expectations and an understanding that neither of us were interested in being the biggest if we couldn't also be the best!

91X FM out of San Diego had sent some folks up to check out the event, they were blown away and asked us to consider doing something with them in San Diego... I couldn't believe it... I never would have even considered producing an event outside of Orange County at that time.

Three months later we produced Scallywag at Waterfront Park in San Diego with 150+ Craft beers, NOFX performed along with, Bad Religion, Reel Big Fish and we had 7,500 in attendance. It was the largest event I had ever been a part of.

(PROFILE continued on page 10)

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(PROFILE continued)

As we're talking, I'm about to head to Boise, Idaho to do a Scallywag there with Bad Religion, Pennywise, Reel Big Fish, Less than Jake and The Interrupters which will feature more than 100 craft beers for the thousands beer fans to taste.

Now we're doing large shows where craft beer is as much the star as the bands performing. Cities like Sacramento, Portland, Seattle, Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Austin, Dallas, Denver, Albuquerque, Phoenix, the Bay Area and beyond. Life's a trip, who'd have ever thought!?!

DRENNON: *It's gotta be a crazy amount of work and high stress to pull off major events like this on a regular basis. How and why do you do it?*

COLLINS: I love it. I worked two jobs for seven years hoping and praying that someday this could become an actual career for me. I read somewhere that being an event producer is the 7th most stressful career there is. I don't know if that's true but it certainly has its moments. The truth is, there is nothing in the

world I would rather be doing. I consider myself very blessed and I'm grateful to be able to be doing this.

DRENNON: *What's been your best day in this craft/music/love fest business?*

COLLINS: Best day ever at an event was probably Punk In Drublic in Pittsburgh earlier this year. What an incredible town. Standing on the balcony of the production offices looking out over the city and a packed house with Reese and Fat Mike from NOFX... it was pretty special.

DRENNON: *What's been your worst?*

COLLINS: Worst day? Every event has its challenges. We win some and we lose some but they're all special. When we fall short, I'm grateful for the lessons I learn. With every shortcoming is a lesson that paves a path to greater things.

DRENNON: *Given that, what are the most valuable lessons you have learned over the course of your first ten years?*

COLLINS: Expect the unexpected and try to prepare for it. There is no such thing as a "home run." Remember



Janoah Stolo (BHHP Production Manager) & Cameron Collins (BHHP)

Photo Courtesy of Brew Ha Ha Productions

to stop, breathe, look at what you've built, thank those who have been part of it and remember that tomorrow is promised to no man. Be the best version of you that you can be.

DRENNON: *Where do you see yourself and Brew Ha Ha in another ten years?*

COLLINS: I suspect that over the next ten years we will be international...

taking the celebration of craft beer beyond our borders and into the hearts and minds of people all over the world. Someone's gotta do it, why not us?!? Who knows?

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

COLLINS: Determined.

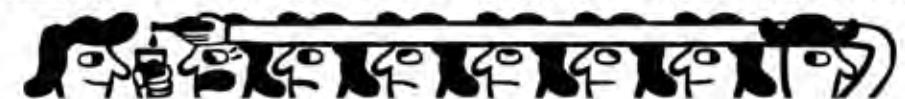


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Jerrold Larsen (Tustin Brewing), Cameron Collins (Brew Ha Ha Productions), Rick Smets (Stereo Brewing)

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COVER STORY

CALIFORNIA CRUSH

by TOMM CARROLL

Yet again, the Golden State led the pack at this year's Great American Beer Festival, mining Gold, Silver and Bronze in the Rocky Mountain State's capital city at the fest's awards ceremony on September 22. Out of more than 8,600 entered beers (including the Pro-Am and Collaboration entries) from 49 states (Mississippi sat this one out) and the District of Columbia, California breweries took home 73 medals — more than twice the amount of the next winningest contender, GABF's home state of Colorado, which won 32. Last year, California's tally was 57.

In a sign of the ever-increasing number of breweries in *Beer Paper's* coverage area — ranging from up in SLO to out in San Berdoo — and the ever-improving quality of their wares, beermakers in our region scored 33 awards — a record haul of just over 45% of all of California's bounty! Divided by "precious medals," there were 11 Gold, 10 Silver and 12 Bronze. Orange County was our big winner, with 11 medals, followed closely by LA with nine. Five other counties shared the remaining 13 (see below for complete list).

And unsurprisingly, those medals were spread amongst 30 breweries. Only three of them won two awards each: Orange's Green Cheek, Placentia's Stereo and Buellton's Figueroa Mountain (although its Westlake Village brewery won one also).

This year's GABF was anticipated as — and will likely be remembered

for — the first accredited competition in which those ubiquitous so-called New England-style hazy, hoppy beers finally got some respect. They also got a style-guide description, formulated by the Brewers Association (which puts on the fest), and therefore could finally be judged in their own three categories: Juicy or Hazy Pale, IPA and Double IPA. Congrats, haze fans; your favorite brews now have their own beer styles.

Little wonder that there were some 673 cloudy brews entered in those three Juicy or Hazy categories, with 391 alone in the IPA section — making it the most competitive beer category at GABF and dethroning the previous top-ranking style, American-Style IPA (311 entries), for the first time in over a decade.

Ironically, of the nine awards presented in that trio of categories, not one medal went to a New England brewery. However, leave it to California breweries — the originators of the West Coast IPA (or American-Style IPA, in BA parlance), the unabashed bitterness of which arguably provoked the decidedly un-bitter East Coast haze craze in the first place — to excel at versions of its reactionary nemesis of beer styles.

Indeed, while Chicago's Alarmist Brewing took the coveted Gold among Juicy or Hazy IPAs with its Le Jus (Golden State brewers were shut out), it was California that had a win, a place and a show in the other two hazy categories. Our own

Black Market Brewing of Temecula grabbed the Gold among hazy DIPAs for its straightforwardly titled New England Style Double IPA, while Northern California's Alvarado Street Brewing (Salinas) burnished the Bronze for Contains No Juice. And Kings Brewing, straight outta Rancho Cucamonga, snagged the Silver in hazy Pales with Sippin' on Dank 2.0.

At the Festival session following the awards ceremony on Saturday afternoon, Black Market's brewmaster Kyle Boruff was happy pouring pitcher after pitcher of his winning brew, as well as Pina Colada and Neopolitan milkshake variations (all of which were extremely tasty). Was he surprised by his win? "I would say excited; I had great confidence in this beer," he responded. "I know everyone's throwing out their best for GABF, especially Double IPAs, which is one of the most entered for a



Brewmaster Kyle Boruff (Black Market)
Photo Credit: Tomm Carroll



Noble Ale Works winning Gold

Photo Credit: Bill Parker

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Beachwood Blendery winning Gold

Photo Credit: Bill Parker



Black Market Brewing winning Gold

Photo Credit: Bill Parker



Claremont Craft Ales winning Gold

Photo Credit: Bill Parker



No Clue Brew Craft Brewery winning Gold

Photo Credit: Bill Parker

new category. It's really great to know that in the first time for this category, we got Gold. We get to set a standard for other brewers trying to create the style, and help out other breweries in the future with what we're trying to accomplish."

The American-Style IPA, now the second largest GABF category, is still highly competitive, and Green Cheek Beer bagged a Bronze for its entry, West Coast IPA Is Dead. Always known for his cheekily named brews, co-owner/brewmaster Evan Price (who judged the competition this year and did not have a booth at the show), explained that he took that name from a comment he heard made by Paul Jones, co-founder and managing director of Manchester, UK's Cloudwater Brewing, describing his preference for hazy IPAs. "I didn't even care if I won," Price conceded. "I just wanted to see that name projected up on the screen at the awards." He got his wish (and the appropriate laughter from the audience), along with his medal. Green Cheek brought home another Bronze in the English Mild category for Fools and Babies.

Another competitive category is American-Style Strong Pale Ale, and George Peterson, owner of Central Coast Brewing in San Luis Obispo, was delighted to win Bronze for the style (the beer had won Gold at the World Beer Cup in 2016). "It's always fun to win a medal," he commented, pointing out that other beers he was pouring at his booth — including Monterey Street Pale Ale and General Schwarz Black Lager — were previous award winners at GABF or WBC. "We're trying to stay at the top of our game."

CCB was also pouring a hazy IPA, the aptly named Dude...It's Not Even Hazy, but Peterson decided not to enter it this year. "We wanted to see how that category played out, because there's so much diversity," he explained. "This year alone, we've done seven or eight of those beers, and everyone fights about which one is their favorite. They're all different, and everyone has different tastes — including the judges. When you don't have a defined style like that, it's a wild card."

When asked about his umpteenth medal (a Silver) for Udder Love in the Cream Stout category, which has earned multiple honors at past GABFs and WBCs, Huntington Beach's

Beachwood Brewing co-owner and brewmaster Julian Shrago said he does not take those awards for granted. He was more excited about, and interested in talking up, his colleagues at Beachwood Blendery, Harrison McCabe and Ryan Fields, for their Gold win in the Belgian-Style Lambic category of the Gueuze-inspired Funk Yeah.



Brian Rauso & Evan Price of Green Cheek
Photo Credit: Tomm Carroll

To this writer's taste, it was the closest-to-authentic American-made Gueuze since Isabelle Proximus, the collaborative Gueuze from Lost Abbey, Avery, Allagash, Dogfish Head and Russian River, was released 10 years ago. From the cheesy nose to the funky finish, it seems to be precisely the kind of I-can't-believe-it's-not-Belgian beer Beachwood co-owner Gabriel Gordon envisioned when he launched the Blendery four years ago.

"This medal is as much Ryan's as it is mine; he's departing Beachwood soon, but he's been the best," McCabe offered when inquired about his win in the Lambic category. "Funk Yeah is a one-, two- and three-year blend; it's not spontaneous. This is the very first blend of this beer, and the fact that it won is really awesome. We had a one-year blend of this beer; it was called Chaos Is a Friend of Mine, and it won a Silver medal here two years ago. That was the one-year component. As it ages, it loses a little bit of the fruitiness, the funk intensity increases, and the acid profile is a little sharper — but not crazy, very balanced."

Last year, Beachwood Blendery won a Bronze for Dia de los Mangos. "We're three for three in our GABF entries," McCabe added. "We're proud of all those beers."

(CALIFORNIA CRUSH continued)
 Following are this year's winning beers, (style categories) and breweries, by county, in *Beer Paper* country:

Orange County

Gold Medals:

Grandpa Tractor (Dortmunder or German-Style Oktoberfest) – Barley Forge Brewing, Costa Mesa

Nobility (Imperial India Pale Ale) – Noble Ale Works, Anaheim

Silver Medals:

Robot (Imperial India Pale Ale) – Stereo Brewing Co., Placentia

Black the Riipper (American-Style Black Ale) – Riip Beer Co., Huntington Beach

Udder Love (Sweet or Cream Stout) – Beachwood Brewing, Huntington Beach

Bronze Medals:

Mischief (American Belgo-Style Ale) – The Bruery, Placentia

Lumino (American-Style Lager or Malt Liqueur), Unsung Brewing Co. – Tustin

West Coast IPA is Dead! (American-Style India Pale Ale) – Green Cheek Beer Co., Orange

Fools & Babies (English-Style Mild Ale) – Green Cheek Beer Co., Orange

Hayshaker (Classic Saison) – Gunwhale Ales, Costa Mesa

Wall of Sound (Oatmeal Stout) – Stereo Brewing Co., Placentia

Los Angeles County

Gold:

Happy Days (Imperial Red Ale) – Claremont Craft Ales, Claremont

Get Up Offa That Brown (English-Style Brown Ale) – Golden Road Brewing, LA

Funk Yeah (Belgian-Style Lambic or Sour Ale) – Beachwood Blendery, Long Beach

Silver:

It's My Island (Classic Irish-Style Dry Stout) – Pocock Brewing Co., Santa Clarita

The Shroud (Imperial Stout) – Bravery Brewing, Lancaster



Riip Beer Co. winning Silver

Photo Credit: Bill Parker



TAPS Fish House and Brewery winning Silver

Photo Credit: Bill Parker



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Green Cheek Beer Co. winning two Bronze Medals

Photo Credit: Bill Parker



The Bruery winning Bronze

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Skag (Scottish Ale) – 6th and La Brea, Los Angeles

Bronze:

Kumquat Saison (Belgian-Style Fruit Beer) – Smog City Brewing, Torrance

Figtoberfest (Dortmunder or German-Style Oktoberfest) – Figueroa Mountain Brewing, Westlake Village

Bear Temper (Barley Wine-Style Ale) – Trustworthy (formerly Verdugo West) Brewing Co., Burbank

Riverside County

Gold:

Raspberry Twist Lager (American-Style Fruit Beer) – Garage Brewing Co., Temecula

New England Style Double IPA (Juicy or Hazy Imperial or Double India Pale Ale) – Black Market Brewing Co., Temecula

Silver:

TAPS Irish Red (Irish-Style Red Ale) – TAPS Fish House and Brewery, Corona

San Bernardino County

Gold:

Belgian Honey Blonde (Honey Beer) – No Clue Brew Craft Brewery, Rancho Cucamonga

Silver:

Sippin’ on Dank 2.0 (Juicy or Hazy Pale Ale) – Kings Brewing Co., Rancho Cucamonga

Ventura County

Gold:

MadeWest Standard (Golden or Blonde Ale) – MadeWest Brewing Co., Ventura

Silver:

Neighborhood (American-Style Pale Ale) – Ventura Coast Brewing Co., Ventura

Bronze:

Nighthawk (Dark Lager) – Enegren Brewing Co., Moorpark

Santa Barbara County

Gold:

Feral Brute (Experimental Beer), Firestone Walker Barrelworks, Buellton

Davy Brown Ale (American-Style Brown Ale) Figueroa Mountain Brewing, Buellton

San Luis Obispo County

Bronze:

Hoppy Poppy IPA (English-Style India Pale Ale) – Figueroa Mountain Brewing, Buellton

San Luis Obispo County

Silver:

* Pixie Dusted (Collaboration Competition) – Firestone Walker Brewing Co., Paso Robles and Firestone Walker Barrelworks, Buellton

Bronze:

Lucky Day (American-Style Strong Pale Ale) – Central Coast Brewing Co., San Luis Obispo

* Shared award

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WISHFUL DRINKING

IF THAT'S INDEPENDENCE I'M TASTING, WHAT'S THIS OFF-FLAVOR I'M GETTING IN THE FINISH?

by TOMM CARROLL

In late August, about three weeks before its largest annual event, the Great American Beer Festival (the results of which can be found elsewhere in this issue), the Boulder, Colorado-based Brewers Association — the not-for-profit trade association dedicated to small and independent craft brewers — launched a new national awareness campaign: the dubious declaration “That’s Independence You’re Tasting.”

Admittedly, it’s a marked improvement over the BA’s misguided, ill-fated and downright embarrassing initiative of last October. As regular readers of this column may recall, that was “Take Craft Back,” a fake crowdfunding effort to “buy” the biggest of Big Beer biggies, Anheuser-Busch InBev, to the tune of its then stock value of \$213 billion. Little wonder that just short of \$4 million in faux funds were pledged by a tad less than 12,000 “independent beer backers” when BA mercifully hit the kill switch on that idiotic idea in mid-December.

As I rhetorically asked in my article about that silly campaign, pointing out that the name “Take Craft Back” misleadingly appears to admit defeat, “Why not call it ‘Keep Craft Independent,’ which is more to the point and actually ties in seamlessly with the BA’s ‘Independent Craft’ seal and campaign, introduced this past June [2017] to distinguish beers brewed by small craft beer companies from those produced by multi-national corporations?”

So this year, it seems that the BA took my (and others’) advice in focusing on “independence” rather than “craft” — a term that has been successfully obfuscated by Big Beer and others to the point that now even thoughtful beer consumers are confused over exactly what that word distinguishes. Big Beer currently owns many previously craft breweries, and does a good job convincing beer drinkers that those acquisitions are still “craft.”

But no matter how much propaganda AB InBev and its macro-brethren generate, or how much brewery ownership status they can conceal from the public in their marketing and packaging, they simply cannot convince anyone with access to a Google search engine that their craft acquisitions still remain “independent.” Take *that*, Big Beer.

All well and good, and the BA’s website (BrewersAssociation.org) explains to the consumer via text and videos why choosing independence is a good and preferable thing for a craft brewery (i.e., “the freedom to create with no limits,” “supporting a brewery with ties to the community,” “take a stance against the status quo,” etc.). However, more importantly, what *isn’t* addressed is what the I-word means in relation to other forms of investments and financial support (besides selling out to Big Beer) that many expanding craft breweries have been considering, courting and even consummating deals with.



Photo Credit: © Brewers Association

So What Does Independence Mean, Anyway?

“Independence” is one of the three pillars that comprise the BA’s definition of a craft brewer; the other two being “small” (producing six million barrels of beer, or less, annually) and “traditional” (producing beers whose flavors derive from traditional or innovative ingredients and fermentation methods, which represent a majority of its total beverage alcohol volume — in other words, using mostly water, malt, hops and yeast).

The description of “independence” seems straightforward enough (less than 25 percent of a craft brewery is owned or controlled — or equivalent economic interest — by a beverage alcohol industry member which is not itself a craft brewer). But therein lies another problem, or at least a loophole.

That definition begs the question: What if a brewery sells over 25 percent to a company or corporation that is not in the alcoholic drinks industry (Coca-Cola, say) — or not in the beverage business at all (like Microsoft)? Would said brewery still maintain its indie cred, according to the BA standards? It would appear so.

Just as Firestone Walker, Boulevard and Ommegang are wholly owned by Duvel Moortgat USA, a subsidiary of Belgium’s family-owned Duvel Moortgat brewery (which also owns several Belgian breweries), they maintain their BA memberships because together those three U.S. breweries produce less than six million barrels per year. In fact, Duvel is considered a craft brewery by the BA.

So if Duvel is craft (try telling that to the Italian craft beer poo-bahs; they kicked Parma’s award-winning Birrificio del Ducato out of the club for selling a minority — and then a majority — stake to the Belgian brewer in the last couple of years), then it must be independent, according to the BA. Hence, craft-on-craft acquisitions — like Green Flash’s buyout of Alpine in 2014 and Coronado’s takeover of Monkey Paw in 2017 — are fine. (Unfortunately, both mergers crashed and burned this year.)

The real elephant in the cold room, however, is Private Equity, which many still-craft breweries have relied upon, accepting minority — and majority — investments, to fund expansions or to keep themselves afloat in the ever-more-competitive craft sector. Like the hypothetical Coke and Microsoft examples above, an investment firm is not an alcohol industry member, so apparently there are no limits to how much of a brewery it can own — and still have it considered craft.

According to Investopedia.com, “Private equity is composed of funds and investors that directly invest in private companies, or that engage in buyouts of public companies.”

Equity Waiver

You may be surprised by the number, of still-considered-craft (and therefore independent) breweries that are in bed with PE, from a minority investment to complete ownership: BrewDog, The

(WISHFUL DRINKING
continued on page 19)

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(WISHFUL DRINKING continued)

Bruery, Dogfish Head, Full Sail, Green Flash/Alpine (after its foreclosure), Logsdon, Long Trail, Stone, Sweetwater and Uinta, to name a few.

And then there are those craft-on-craft/PE hybrids, American Brewing Ventures and CANarchy — both of which the BA also considers craft breweries. The former, funded by Ulysses Management LLC, owns Southern Tier and Victory. The latter, funded by Fireman Capital, has been on an M&A tear of late, and has picked up Oscar Blues, Cigar City, Perrin, Squatters, Wasatch, Deep Ellum and, most recently, Inglewood’s own Three Weavers (the second LA craft brewery to be acquired, and only three years after the first — Golden Road by AB InBev — curiously both before they were even four years old).

I don’t know if there is something in the water there in Boulder, but this is not what “independence” sounds like to me.

In an article entitled “Independent Craft Brewers Have a Right to Compete with Megabrewers,” posted to the BA’s spin-off website *CraftBeer.com* shortly after the launch of its Independence campaign, co-founder and chairman of Brooklyn Brewing Steve Hindy writes, “...[P]rivate equity is demanding but it does not confer any unfair advantage in the marketplace [as megabrewers do]. Private equity is just money, impatient money.”

And I guess Hindy should know. Despite an international investment and distribution partnership with the Carlsberg Group, and the sale of a BA-safe 24.5% share to Japan’s Kirin Brewing, as well as its minority investments in the 21st Amendment and Funkwerks breweries, Brooklyn remains an independent craft brewer.

But back to that phrase “impatient money.” While many brewery owners who turn to PE for money to fund their long-term growth, the current private equity acquisition of breweries trend is no guarantee that their funders have that patience.

In a 2016 *Forbes* article entitled “Private Equity in the Craft Beer Market Spells Upheaval Within a Decade,” writer Tara Nurin points out, “Despite what you might have believed, PE investors aren’t satisfied to collect off annual profits. A traditional private equity fund, which pools money from wealthy individual and institutional investors to take equity stakes in companies, has a finite lifespan of usually 10 years. When that fund sunsets, investors



Photo Credit: © Brewers Association

expect to get paid out. A lot.

“What does this mean for the industry?” she continues. “Of the more than half-dozen high-profile equity deals that have taken place recently, most of the PE firms will look to exit three to five years afterward, launching a rash of the re-sales and public offerings that the craft community so derides. If a profitable exit doesn’t look possible, the firm may hold longer, but something has to happen by the end of the fund’s 10-year lifespan, or in some cases a few years afterward, if it gets an extension from investors.”

And who might be lining up to take advantage of that re-sale? Big Beer, that’s who. And there goes the independence — and the craft cred. The term “craft” became so muddled that the BA decided to focus on “independence.” But with the increase in PE ownership, that term may prove to be purposeless as well — especially when investors come calling for their payout. The BA may have to alter its definitions yet again.

And finally, as a writer and a beer judge, I must take issue with the BA’s new campaign catchphrase: “That’s Independence You’re Tasting.” Certainly, those good folks in Boulder must know better. Just as one cannot smell bitterness in a beer, likewise one cannot taste independence in a beer.

Award-winning beer writer Tomm Carroll is a longtime contributor to Celebrator Beer News. A card-carrying member of the Brewers Association, he remains an “independent” thinker when it comes to his support for craft beer. Contact him at beerscribe@earthlink.net.



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YAEGER SHOTS

CENTRAL COAST'S TERROIR PROJECT

by BRIAN YAEGER



Feral Brut @ Jim Crooks
Photo Credit: Firestone Walker

The narrow space that distinguishes romance from poetry is the same distance that prevented Darren and Jill Siple from completely losing their 140-acre farm atop Rincon Mountain in Ventura County when it was partially scorched by the nearly 300,000-acre Thomas Fire. It's here that they operate Rincon Mountain Winery as well as the presciently named Smoke Mountain Brewery. Relatively few local beer lovers have heard of the new-ish brewery, nor one of the hybrid styles of alcoholic beverages they make since, for lack of a better description, let's call it wine beer. Ever since the Siples started making them two years ago, they poetically call these romantic beers harvest blends.

There's an industry idiom: "It takes a lot of beer to make great wine." What to make of wine beers is becoming an industry riddle. It's verboten to blend wine and beer. Yet it's federally kosher for a beer's fermentables to come from over 50 percent cereal like malted barley, which means a beer that's 49 percent wine grape juice co-fermented with wort is something California's

Central Coast brewers are increasingly experimenting with. One, in particular, has struck gold with it.

At this year's Great American Beer Festival, Firestone Walker Barrelworks in Buellton earned a gold medal in, fittingly, the Experimental Beer category for Feral Brut. The "beer" is the result of a 2014 invitation from nearby Foxen Winery to brew a hybrid "champagne." Master blender Jim Crooks, under the guidance of winemaker Bill Watham, used Pinot Noir grapes crushed under foot and then co-fermented with a blonde ale in French oak barrels. The result was bottled back in 2016, aged on the lees (residual yeast) until earlier this year, riddled (the time consuming process of disgorging the lees) according to méthode Champenoise, and marked its debut by impressing the hell out of the world's foremost certified beer judges.

Far from a one-off experiment, Crooks and Barrelworks have been releasing a series of beers under the name Feral Vinifera. There are several barrels aging myriad beers co-fermented with mostly white wine grape varietals: Sauvignon Blanc, Chennin Blanc, Muscat, etcetera. The series is ongoing because the education is ongoing. Whereas brewmaster Matt Brynildson's primary objective at the main production brewery in Paso Robles is to create consistent beer year in and year out with fancy lab equipment and a panel of expert tasters running quality control, Crooks finds himself accounting for brix and titratable acidity that aren't typically the realm of the brewer's measurements. These beers are less mastered and more observed; they're perhaps more playground than classroom.

It's worth mentioning that Feral Vinifera #4 is also an award-winning beer. In 2017, it garnered a gold medal at the Brussels Beer Challenge, one of the most prestigious global beer competitions, where it took home the Comac Trophy honoring the most notable "international revelation." Feral Vinifera is "hard to describe using consistent English or German

beer terminology," says Crooks. "Winemakers have great descriptions and (Feral Vinifera) leans heavily toward tasting like wine." As such, don't call it "grapey." Look for its soft tannins and flinty minerality.

Firestone Walker's not alone. At the end of September, they held the first annual Terroir Project wherein they invited additional terroir-minded brewers from across the globe: St. Louis's vaunted Side Project, Austin's Jester King, New Zealand's Garage Project, and others. Just imagine, an entire beer festival and nary an IPA.

Back at Smoke Mountain, they have made precious few IPAs anyway. Not that they don't like hops. The Siples have additional land up near Paso Robles with a vineyard and even a barley field and hopyard. All in all, they grow Nugget, Pacific Gem, Columbus and Chinook hops as well as Sauvignon Blanc, Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre, Tempranillo, Cab Sauv, Zin, and Barbera grapes. "Our goal," says Jill, "is to be a 100 percent estate brewery by 2020." It's a rarity in the wine world and virtually non-existent in the beer world, but Smoke Mountain isn't like other breweries.

They made a Belgian Quad the day they picked the Barbera grapes and then co-fermented the two together in the same fermentation vessel. They made a saison with Sauvignon Blanc grapes (without the skins). "We're finding that the co-fermentation blends and post fermentation blends have very different results and we like to play around with both," says Jill. "The Harvest Blends end up being more of a shot-in-the-dark, but fortunately all of our co-ferments have turned out delicious." Please note that, currently, they only sell the Harvest Blends to club members.

Wine makers, at the end of a long day, wind up drinking lots of beer. Often cheap, light stuff. It's said this is because nothing sates like a cold, refreshing drink absent the complexity of the wines they make and, hence, doesn't require deep assessment. But perhaps wine beers are the bridge that'll link these two worlds. The

results can be mind-blowing, both for beer drinkers seeking new styles and wine lovers who are discovering that not all beers "taste like beer."

Making those straightforward beers is how brewmaster Chuck Silva spent twenty years before parting ways with Green Flash in San Diego to move back to his native Central Coast where he and his wife settled in Paso Robles to create Silva Brewing. From the get-go, despite excelling at hop-forward IPAs that put Green Flash on the map, Silva says, "My vision was to make something brut and champagne-like, not just accented by grapes." And because Paso is surrounded by vineyards and wineries, it didn't take long to befriend Anthony Yount, winemaker at Denner Vineyards just up the road from the brewery. Denner's esteemed Rosés weren't exactly Silva's inspiration, but obtaining the same free-run, cold-stabilized Grenache Blanc juice allowed Silva to co-ferment with his kettle-soured ale called The Pink Stuff.

The beer underwent primary fermentation with a French saison ale yeast. Silva then aged it in French oak (previously used to mature white wine) and it finished with a champagne yeast. The result became an instant hit in Paso both among wine drinkers and beer drinkers (including the beer-drinking winemakers). Only one barrel was produced, but already the plan is to double, perhaps quadruple that, with this October's Grenache Blanc crush.

"The surprising thing for our customers was that it tastes more wine-like than beer-like," notes Silva, allowing that the resulting beer displayed plenty of the grape character along with "subtleties of strawberry, raspberry, and watermelon." And therein lies the quandary of what a wine beer is supposed to taste like.

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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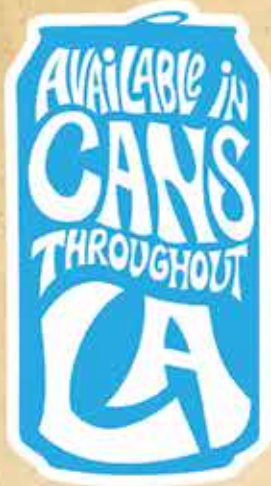
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