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THE OTHER SIDE OF CRAFT



Pete Gillespie (middle) and Jos Ruffell (right) at FWIBF2017

**NEW ZEALAND'S
GARAGE PROJECT
OPENS A BEACHHEAD
IN SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA IN THEIR
AMERICAN INVASION**



Rob Wallace of Craft Imports

Photos by Julie Verive

By John M Verive

A pair of enthusiastic and entrepreneurial friends making beer by the bucketful decide to launch a brewery. With a repurposed auto shop, an abundance of creativity and a thirsty community, their brand takes hold. Growth follows, and with it pride, and a whole lot more work. In a matter of years there's new facilities, more fans and a whole lot more beer. The beer flows out further to new lands and new fans, and what was once an experiment on a half-barrel pilot brewery is now recognized around the world. It's a by-the-numbers story that could apply to any number of the thousands of American craft breweries, but there's one crucial difference in this story: it's set on the other side of the planet in New Zealand. (Full cover story on page 12)

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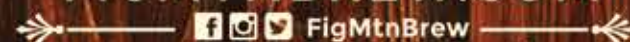


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MAUI BEER-CATION

By Daniel Drennon

What is better than traveling to tour a state-of-the art brewery built with solar power and based on sustainability principles? When that award-winning brewery happens to be on the gorgeous island of Maui. Owners Garrett Marrero and Melanie Oxley are fiercely committed to remaining independent and, even more importantly, remaining 100% beer produced at home in Maui.

They opened MBC in 2005 with 34 employees in an old warehouse in Lahaina. Recently, their popularity led to a move to the aforementioned new brewery in Kihei. They now employ 400 employees and expect to double that to 800 in 2018 with the opening of a couple of Maui Brewing restaurants. Their production capacity has blossomed to an incredible 100,000 barrels annually with distribution to 23 states and ten countries.

That impressive growth, commitment to the environment, growing their business organically and staying 100% Maui led to their selection as 2017 National Small Business Person(s) of the Year.

Best of all, since I last visited Maui in 2013, the already solid line up of beers has been dialed in by Director of Brewing Operations Jesse Houck (formerly of Golden Road and before that, Drake's) and Brewmaster Kim Brisson-Lutz (formerly of Saint Archer and before that, Maui Brewing – boomerang!). I was extremely impressed with all of the styles Maui brews, but blown away by the Pau Hana pilsner. When you are baking on Maui's world class beaches every day, nothing satisfies like a perfect pilsner.

They also still feature their iconic Bikini Blonde lager (also refreshing for hot days) and their flagship Big Swell IPA. I recall asking Marrero back in 2013 if they could West Coast it a bit more as then I found it a tad malty and sweet compared with what was popular in Cali. It appears Ms. Brisson-Lutz has made Big Swell hoppier and dryer...or perhaps that is just my imagination. But it, along with all of their beers seem to have gotten even better as one might expect from two critically-acclaimed brewers like Houck and Brisson-Lutz.

Proving to be a leader in the American craft beer world, Marrero expects Maui Brewing to be completely energy-independent by the end of 2018 and was one of the early adopters of canning beer as the environmentally-preferred option. Clearly, Maui Brewing is establishing itself as a brewery others should model themselves after. What the hell is any cooler than that? Being on beautiful Maui of course.



Jesse Houck and Kim Brisson-Lutz of Maui Brewing with Daniel Drennon
Photo by Jolie Hackney

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Beer Paper is an online and monthly print publication dedicated to providing and promoting news, commentary, education, and growth for the craft beer communities of Los Angeles and Orange County. Our contributors are all beer writers and industry professionals.

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OWEN'S RANTS

By Owen Williams

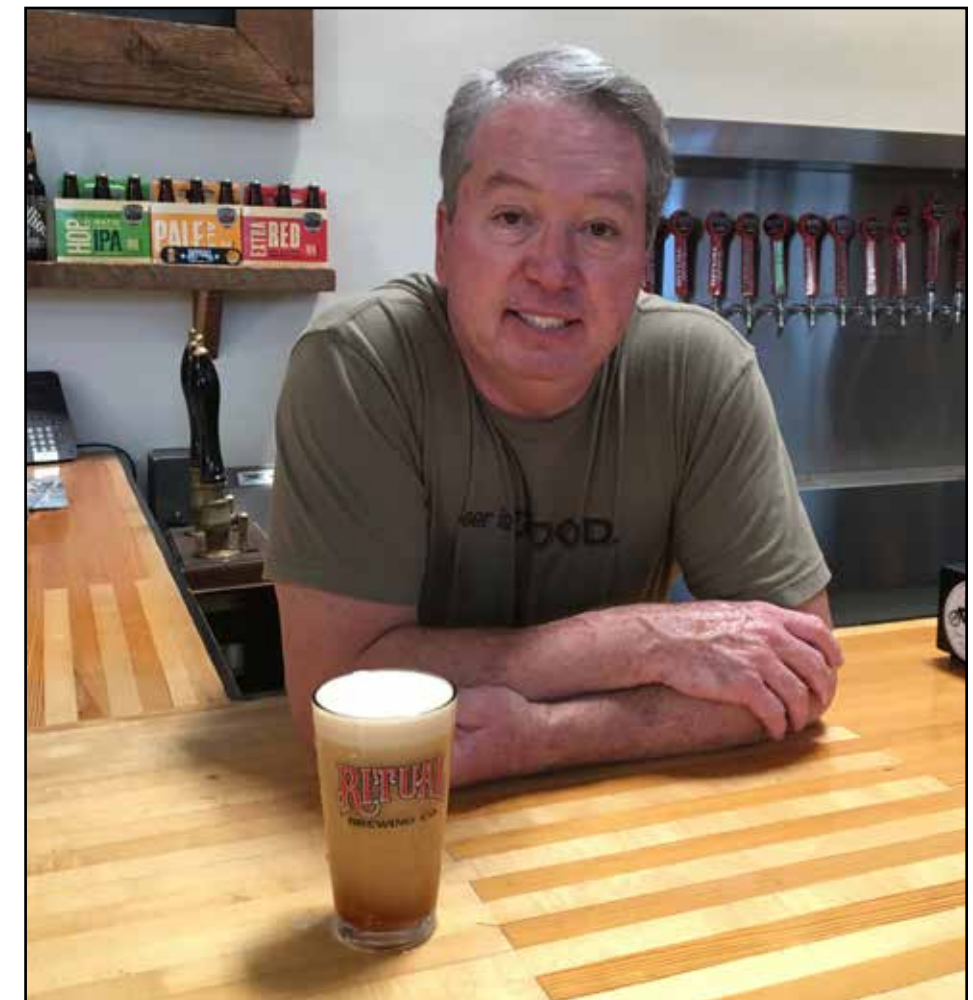
Craft Beer in Cans: Yes, it may be more environmentally friendly, the “cool” thing to do, labels are fun (some are strange), convenient to pack, save shelf space, lighter, easier to carry, safe around pools...blah blah blah. However, what are your levels of dissolved oxygen and carbon dioxide (DOs and Co2)? If you don't know for sure, it will lead to an inferior product being sold to your consumers. Most of the portable canners and the canning lines that small craft brewers are using introduce a butt load of oxygen into the beer being filled into the cans and let a bunch of Co2 out.

Oxygen is beer's enemy—Carbon Dioxide gives beer its bubbles. Oxygen creates off flavors and/or makes it taste like cardboard or wet paper. This kind of canned beer needs to be consumed immediately (or as soon as possible—check the production date on the can); the longer it sits in the can, the less it will taste like the original craft beer that was put into the can. Growlers and Crowlers also have air introduced and if you've ever consumed a half filled growler a week later, it doesn't taste as good as it did when it was fresh.

Speaking to one of the new mobile canners, they do in fact measure the DO and Co2 in the final product so you'll know about how long it's going to last on the shelf before the consumer gets a hold of it. So, make sure you are getting the quality of product you want in the cans. One also needs to consider the amount of DO in the beer prior to packaging to get a qualitative measurement. Many of the mobile cans I've seen filled, weren't filled all the way: low fills...How the F does this happen?...if you can squeeze the can and it gives (squeezes soft; unlike a full soda can) it isn't full of beer, but most likely full of damaging air and an absence of effervesces! If you don't mind oxidized beer, go ahead and drink cans from sources that don't test the final product but, if you actually like the flavor beer has to offer and you want a decent amount of 'shelf-life' then stick with a reliable source or even better straight from the tap....then you'll know right away if it's any good.

NE style IPAs (i.e. Hazy IPAs). This is a bunch of crap! Until recently, when the millennials started brewing, a Hazy IPA meant it wasn't ready to drink yet...haze being from yeast or pectin...what is wrong with actually letting the beer mature as it should and drink it when it is actually ready and not pulling it early just to make an extra dollar? Even homebrewers know (or used to know) that a Hazy IPA wasn't a good thing and they needed to let it lager longer and/or at least filter the beer before serving. Geez, there are/were beer style guidelines for a reason and sure some of you are saying: “Oh yeah, rules are meant to be broken” but, some rules just shouldn't be broken and this is one of them. As all bad things should, this “fad” of Hazy IPAs will go to the wayside in due time but, don't expect to see me brewing one of these rushed concoctions anytime soon.

And I don't know about you but a belly full of Snickers and a yeasty beer is a great recipe for gas production or a significant imbalance of my personal flora and fauna leading to intestinal distress and as my wife says: 'foul odors'...So if I don't drink your cloudy IPA don't get offended, I just figure you are selling more beer than you have capacity for and you are rushing it...good for you...I'll pass on that beer and find something quaffable. Wynkoop during GABF week has all hazy beers and always has...more power to them...I feel sorry for the poor bastards that have to work the four story, 15 bbl system that produces 6,000 bbl (at least that what they say on the sign) a year and consume it on site!?! Not for me, I'll be down the street drinking non-hazy, fully matured, flavor intended beer, for my enjoyment.



Owen Williams of Ritual Brewing

Photo by: Susan Stoltenberg

And another thing: Beer with fruit or fruit extract added to cover up a poorly made product. This is a sacrilege to brew beer and when it is ready to consume, taste the beer and decide: “Uh oh! This isn't what style it was supposed to be and it tastes ‘funny’, so let's just add some fruit or extract and pretend that we intended it to be that way”. Adding fruit or other adjuncts to beer to cover up flaws is just admitting you're a home brewer who is way in over your head and can't actually make good beer. Albeit there are good “fruit beers” that are actually made with fruit and are intended to be consumed that way but, there are way too many bad beers disguised as fruity beers that give craft beer a bad name. If you have to disguise a flaw by adding fruit, something is wrong; go back and figure out what you did wrong and fix it....don't play stupid saying that you wanted it that way. Now if you are making a Berliner-Wiesse and want to enhance the quaffability, and you added sweet syrup, then that's another thing.

Just my two cents. Drink fresh and flavorful, my friends.

Owen Williams is Co-Founder of Ritual Brewing Co in Redlands CA, Vice-Chair CEU B.E.E.R. (Brewing Education Executive Roundtable) Cal Poly Pomona, Guest Lecturer Collins College of Hospitality Management, built 11 breweries for BJ's as Director of New Brewing Operations, Certified Cicerone, Beer Judge / Critic and craft beer drinker.

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BEER SO SLOW IT'S LIKE WINE: DRY RIVER BREWING FINALLY OPENS BOYLE HEIGHTS TASTING ROOM

By Sarah Bennett



Naga Reshi of Dry River Brewing

Photo by Daniel Drennon

For most of the last two years, some of the most beautiful-weirdo beers being made in Los Angeles were woefully hard to find. Unless you lived near downtown – where the tiny Dry River Brewing produces from a low-slung warehouse in a patch of Boyle Heights that’s almost the Arts District – stumbling across a bottle of one of their botanical sours, tart blondes or wild barleywines was like hunting for a bottle of Cantillon.

To guarantee yourself a sip from a keg of the latest blend from brewmaster and barrel whisperer Naga Reshi, you’d have to go to Bar Bandini or Everson Royce Bar, among the few places (still) ballsy enough to save a permanent handle for beers that have more flavors in common with wine than the IPAs that most drinkers now seek. (Or, alternatively, sign up for their quarterly Collector’s Club and get shipments at your door.)

But all that changed this summer, with the grand opening of Dry River’s tasting room, built into the same space as the solar-energy-fueled nanobrewery and often staffed by Reshi along with co-owners Vanda Cicervoya and Dave Hodgins.

Finally: a one-stop shop for not only Dry River draft pours and bottles, but also insight into the complex mix of bacteria, yeast, wood and time that goes into making each release unique. “We use the term ‘slow beer’ to describe our process for people who are new to sour or funky beers,” Hodgins says. “It helps get across the point that the types of beers we’re making take a long time – some up to 3 years.”

Dry River’s slow beers take so long because they’re made the old-fashioned way, with seasonal ingredients and native flora combined through a process that creates as little impact on the environment as possible. Every beer is entirely barrel-fermented after being brewed on a solar-thermal water heating system, which means that small batches are crafted with no gas or electricity. The brewery doesn’t need a water heater to steam-clean barrels or kegs and it avoids additional energy use by not regulating the natural cellar temperature in the barrel room.



Photo by Johnny Byul Lee

Because everything is made through a natural process, each batch turns out slightly different than the previous one, even when recipes are replicated. This fact might freak out other small brewers, but Dry River bucks the “consistency is everything” mantra of craft brewing and instead embraces the creative freedom that comes with letting nature play a role in final flavor.

“We’ve always used oak barrels to ferment and condition our beers, but now that we’ve been producing for a few years we have a lot more mature barrels to work with, so we’re doing more blends which is fun,” says Hodgins, who is a sustainability consultant by day. “It’s practically unlimited what you can do when you start blending, especially when you start adding fruit, botanicals, hops, and other kinds of ingredients.”

The taproom design reflects this experimental spirit and was built out by Reshi with the same dedication to local souring and natural processing as the beers. If you’ve ever driven by the address listed on the back of Dry River bottles (or visited Indie Brewing’s taproom across the street), you’ve perhaps seen the hulking hand-made front door that has enough metal and woodworking to look like the entrance to some steampunk apothecary. Every Friday, Saturday and Sunday, that door now slides open to reveal Dry River’s modestly sized tasting room, filled with long tables and a wrap-around bar forged from all colors of reclaimed wood.

Six taps are stocked with everything from stalwarts like Lady Roja (a hibiscus saison) to more recent probes, like Sequioia, made with tree bark Reshi collected on a recent camping trip. Bottles are available in a small fridge next to the bar. Hodgins says to expect more single-barrel projects and other taproom-only specialties soon. “It’s been amazing to finally be able to interact directly with our supporters, see their reactions, and tell them more about the beers,” Hodgins says. “People from the area have said ‘I saw that crazy door and I wondered what was going on in here.’”



Photo by Johnny Byul Lee



Photo by Johnny Byul Lee

Dry River’s tasting room is a long-time coming. Even though the brewery isn’t near residential properties or even the main retail drags of Boyle Heights, the neighborhood – which is doing its best to fight the rapid gentrification from outsiders – was concerned about having another new liquor license in the area. Like Indie Brewing nearby, Dry River waited on applying for a tasting room permit until the community could get to know the operation and the owner’s intentions. With Reshi living less than a mile away and Hodgins’ history of creating positive hyperlocal change through his sustainability practice, the permit was approved earlier this year (the fact that the brewery’s whole goal is to create public space along the L.A. River also helped).

“It was important to us that the community support the project, so we restricted ourselves to manufacturing until the support was there,” Hodgins says. “It took time, but the support has been amazing and that’s what we’re about — being part of the community.”

Sarah Bennett is a freelance journalist covering craft beer, food, drinks, music and more for the L.A. Weekly, O.C. Weekly, L.A. Times and more. Follow her on Twitter @thesarahbennett and if you see her out in the wild, say hi (and buy her the weirdest sour on tap).



Photo by Johnny Byul Lee



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COVER STORY

THE OTHER SIDE OF CRAFT

NEW ZEALAND'S GARAGE PROJECT OPENS A BEACHHEAD IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA IN THEIR AMERICAN INVASION

By John M Verive

A pair of enthusiastic and entrepreneurial friends making beer by the bucketful decide to launch a brewery. With a repurposed auto shop, an abundance of creativity and a thirsty community, their brand takes hold. Growth follows, and with it pride, and a whole lot more work. In a matter of years there's new facilities, more fans and a whole lot more beer. The beer flows out further to new lands and new fans, and what was once an experiment on a half-barrel pilot brewery is now recognized around the world. It's a by-the-numbers story that could apply to any number of the thousands of American craft breweries, but there's one crucial difference in this story: it's set on the other side of the planet in New Zealand.

I first tasted a Garage Project beer back in the summer of 2012 when a friend returned from a trip to his native Wellington with a knapsack stuffed with tee shirt-wrapped bottles. He traveled regularly between New Zealand and L.A., and each trip meant more new Garage Project beers to try. Today, you no longer need a friendly Kiwi to bring you samples. Garage Project brews have been imported since 2016 and are distributed around Southern California, and a new nationally-distributed collaboration with Stone Brewing (also featuring London's Beavertown Brewery) is the brewery's widest exposure yet in the States — and the next phase in Garage Project's U.S. invasion.

This invasion started with an infiltration on a smaller scale. Back at the end of 2012, Garage Project co-founder Jos Ruffell turned up unannounced at Stone Brewing's Escondido headquarters with a few bottles of beer and talked his way into a meeting with some Stone brewers and brewery founders Steve Wagoner and Greg Koch. It happened that Ruffell visited Stone on the night of the culmination of Stone's 12-year Vertical Epic project, and he was invited to attend the celebratory dinner where he further ingratiated himself with the Stone leadership.

Prior to starting Garage Project in 2011, Ruffell worked in New Zealand's video game industry, which meant frequent travel to America frequently where he fell for craft beer. When back in Wellington he often decompressed from the long hours of the entertainment industry at the beer geek haven Hashigo Zake bar with his childhood friend Ian Gillespie. Gillespie's older brother Pete was a brewer himself who'd trained in the UK and brewed in England and Australia. The elder Gillespie wanted, as most brewers do, to launch his own brewery, and the trio decided to give it a shot under the Garage Project label with the idea to brew 24 different beers in 24 weeks to be served at Hashigo Zake.

"We didn't want to just start a beer brand," Ruffell says, "For us it was important that we were a brewery from day one, even if that meant brewing just 50 liters at a time." Beer brands with no equipment abounded in New Zealand's scene at the time; there is no law against a company buying taps at bars, and many brands would invest their capital into branding and pay-to-play tap space instead of building breweries of their own. Pete Gillespie was a brewer, and he wanted the control and the freedom that running his own brewhouse allowed. Of course breweries are not inexpensive, and modest startup funds meant Garage Project would have to make due with a half-barrel pilot brewing system, but this constraint also had its upsides. "Since we didn't have to go to the bank early on, they didn't have us by the short and curlies," Gillespie says. "You can be a lot more creative when you aren't worried about making repayments to the bank on day one." Ruffell adds: "We were able to take risks that we wouldn't have taken starting with a 10, 15, 20 barrel system. We could be a lot more relentless and aggressive."

Garage Project's rise from humble beginnings in a Wellington petrol station to international renown took relentless creativity and aggressive explorations into the fringes of beer, but it was a flair for the dramatic that catalyzed the brewery's success. At Beervana — New Zealand's largest beer festival — Garage Project built a reputation for out-sized booths and performative showcase brews that drew long



The GP line at FWIBF 2017

Photo by Julie Verive

lines. Red hot pokers, carefully-poured double (or triple) layer parfaits, and wild ingredients captured the attention of festival attendees and sparked conversations about the inventive brewers.

Firestone Walker brewmaster Matt Brynildson attended Beervana in 2013 and Garage Project made enough of an impression that he invited the Kiwis to pour at the Firestone Walker Invitational Beer Festival in 2014. That event was the first large scale exposure in America for the brewery, and curious drinkers formed one of the longest lines of the day for a taste of the dramatic Two Tap Flat White. A nod to the antipodal coffee specialty known as a flat white (basically a 6-ounce latte that's topped with milk frothed to a velvety texture called "microfoam"), the beer was actually a combination of two separate brews (hence the "two tap"). A rich imperial coffee stout served as the base while a sweet cream stout served on nitro topped the dark stout with fluffy foam.

Two Tap Flat White captured the essence of what makes Garage Project noteworthy. It is creative and inventive in concept and execution, but more importantly it works as flavorful beer. The first sip emphasizes the sweet nitro foam, and you taste the richness of the stout on the second sip. As the two layers meld into each other the experience just improves with the lactose-heavy top layer softening the roasted bitterness and alcoholic bite of the coffee stout. It becomes more than the sum of its components.

"I think you can tell if somebody has done a beer just to get a reaction out of people," Pete Gillespie says. "I don't think we've ever done that. Anything that we've ever done - even if it perhaps had outlandish ingredients - there's a very good reason for it. Hopefully anyone who tastes the beer will realize that the beer was worth it, that it wasn't a stunt, it wasn't just to get people riled up."

And there have been some outlandish ingredients used in Garage Project beers, from the relatively pedestrian spices and exotic fruits, to New Zealand native medicinal plants, to Katsuobushi (fermented fish flakes), to recent use of hemp seeds and fibre in one of six beers inspired by the silk road, to this year's standout of Beervana: Aardvark, which features a few heaping scoops of Atta cephalotes, A.K.A the lemongrass ant.

"That was cool. It sounds like a stunt, so we did lots of bench trials," says Gillespie, "and anted beer just tasted genuinely more interesting and fun than non-anted beer. So I think that was a win."

Apart from the more wild additives, Garage Project is adept at using more common items from New Zealand - namely the distinctive Southern Hemisphere hops and the grapes grown for the thriving New Zealand wine industry. They've also opened a second facility in Wellington, dubbed the Wild Workshop, to explore sour beer, wild yeast and wood aging. Dozens of different beers are cooked up each year, and the brewers have tried to avoid the idea of a flagship beer or core lineup of regular releases.

"You only learn when you're doing new things," says Ruffell, but the pace at Garage Project can be withering. Gillespie's been hospitalized for exhaustion and forced to slow down while Ruffell has built a reputation as one of the most ceaseless travellers in the industry. "I thought Greg [Koch, Stone Brewing founder] traveled a lot, I don't think he holds a candle to Jos," says Stone's Senior Manager of Innovation Jeremy Moynier. "I run into him all over the country, at the strangest places."

The industry connections and fortuitous meetings have helped Garage Project get a foothold in America's craft beer scene, and apart from collaborations with Stone, Sierra Nevada — in this year's Beer Camp Across the World project — and European breweries such as Nøgne Ø, it is connections, partnerships and collaborations back home that keep the brewers creative juices flowing.

"It's more stimulating to do collaboration with people that aren't brewers," says Ruffell. "When you get in the room with a chef or a musician or a designer, the conversation about what they do is quite fascinating, and ideas [for beer] come out of that." A conversation with New Zealand's champion barista was the creative spark for Two Tap Flat White. "Just watching him construct this beautiful cup of coffee — watching a real artist at work was really inspiring," says Gillespie.

Another homegrown connection made at the Hashigo Zake bar was Andrew Balmuth who's Global Craft Trading company ships containers of American Craft beer across the globe, and who supplied the Hashigo with much of its American and Japanese beer. Balmuth's Nephew Eli Raffeld started Craft Imports LLC to bring some international beers into America, and they began discussions about importing Garage Project brews. The talks lasted for years as Garage Project struggled to fill orders on their home island and with the increasing demand in nearby Australia. In the meantime Garage Project joined Stone Brewing and another brand under the Craft Imports banner: Japan's Coedo Brewery. That collaboration - Tsuyu Saison - mixed ume plums and red perilla leaf and was aged in freshly emptied New Zealand chardonnay barrels that were shipped to Japan in a refrigerated container.

The new Stone / Garage Project collaboration is equally complex. The renowned Beavertown Brewery joined the team for the Fruitallica brew - a pungent mashup of double IPA and exotic ingredients. A 20-foot refrigerated container full of delicate golden kiwi fruits was shipped to California from New Zealand for the brewday, and fresh yuzu and a dose of habanero peppers joins a blend of Southern Hemisphere and classic American hops.

Former Stone brewmaster Mitch Steele got the ball on the collaboration between the three breweries rolling, but delays in the sourcing of ingredients (namely those golden kiwi) meant the collaboration wasn't brewed before he departed Stone. "It seemed like a natural partnership," says Steve Gonzales, Stone's Senior Manager of Brewing and Innovation. "They're really good at packing flavor into beer."

While these globe-spanning collaborations are logistical challenging, just getting beer from New Zealand on to American shelves can seem even more daunting. A handful of different Garage Project beers have made the voyage, including the Death From Above IPA (featuring mango, Vietnamese mint and chilies), the collaboration with the New Zealand Ballet: Hops On Pointe, and a few of the brewery's wine-based blends: Sauvignon Nouveau and Rose de la Vallee. But the brewers have avoided sending many of their most hop-forward creations (A three week ocean voyage means it takes more than a month for beer to get from the brewery to SoCal shelves). Further complicating things are the large-format 650ml bottles which have landed stateside at a time when the beer consumer is moving away from the bomber as preferred package.

"It's ironic," says Ruffell, "We're really a can-heavy brewery. We started canning in New Zealand in 2013, but we always planned to ship bombers to America." Garage Project beer is distributed by Stone Distribution in Southern California (some of their beer also makes it to Las Vegas and Chicago, and soon to the Bay Area), but even the veteran distribution company has found it challenging to market Garage Projects inventive, and often expensive beers. "I feel like sometimes we're a square peg in



Jos Ruffell pouring at FWIBF2017

Photo by Julie Verive

a round hole," Ruffell says about fitting Garage Project into the American market. "We're a different beast than what Stone is used to, but we're both working to make it work." They plan to emphasize more unique draft brews going forward, and Ruffell says he's excited about presenting some of Garage Project's more theatrical special event beers in California.

Even after all the internet buzz, industry goodwill and excited coverage in the beer press, you can be excused for wondering why you should seek out Garage Project when the market for local California beer is perhaps the most exciting, and congested, in the country. Why would the two ambitious brewers from the other side of the planet even bother with exports and all that travel and added expenses of opening the U.S. market?

"You can be a big fish in the small pond of New Zealand, but unless you get that acknowledgement from overseas you haven't really made it," Ruffell says. "We're not doing it for sound business reasons," Gillespie adds, "It kinda just feels good."

The desire to earn your stripes on the world stage seems a part of Kiwi culture, a reaction to the isolation inherent in existence on a remote island. "I think ultimately all Kiwis sort of grow up looking out on the world," explains Ruffell. "It's always exciting to try things from around the world, and I think for us part of it is just repaying that back. So someone in the states might hopefully taste something we're doing and be excited by it. Hopefully we have enough of a voice and are doing something that unique and people will want that experience of beers brewed in New Zealand."

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. John loves lagers, session beers, finding perfect pairings, and telling the stories of the people behind the pints; you can follow him on Twitter and Instagram at @octopusht and @beeroftomorrow.

PROFILE

LISTEN TO YOUR BEER - STEREO BREWING COMPANY

By Charlie Perez



Owner/Head Brewer Rick Smets at the steps of the brewhouse

Photo by Charlie Perez

Have you ever listened to your beer? We all measure beer by our sense of sight, taste, smell, and touch. But, how often do we listen to what our beer is telling us? Stereo Brewing Company is changing that. Owner and head brewer Rick Smets, along with his lovely wife Amanda, assistant brewer J.D., and the entire tasting room staff are on a mission to ensure we use all of our senses when experiencing our favorite beverage. From the vinyl records playing in the tasting room, to Rick rocking out to jams playing loudly over the speakers in the brewery, to hosting live bands showcasing their talents on a regular basis, Stereo Brewing Company is living up to its name. The clean, consistent, and stylistically correct beers have plenty to say if one gives them a chance to hear what they have to say.

Stereo's tasting room is decorated with music memorabilia, a working vinyl record player, and board games. "I want it to be more of a social club than a typical tasting room," Rick said during a recent visit. "I want everyone to socialize, meet new people, listen to good music, and have good beer." Rick will frequently come out from backstage and talk to the crowds enjoying his creations. When asked about the music decor and decision to name the brewery "Stereo," his response was simple. "Music. My life is a soundtrack." Stereo will be celebrating their first-year anniversary this coming October. The celebration will feature, naturally, some live bands.

Consistency is not typically a descriptor used to describe new breweries, unfortunately. Rick has created a product-line with the quality and consistency you find at larger scale breweries. "We've been called a 'beginner's brewery.' Usually it's not a compliment. You know, that doesn't offend me. I know what they mean by that. So, I thank them." Brewing since the age of 16 as a homebrewer, learning the art from his years at Left Coast Brewing and Firestone Walker, and setting quality as a high-standard, consistency is inevitable at Stereo. However, consistency would be nothing if the quality was not at such a high level. "You buy these tickets for your favorite band. You wait patiently for months. The day finally comes. Why be late?" Rick explains how he modified this concert going patience concept to his brewing process. "Many will try to speed up their brew day and spend less time in the brewery. I figure, why speed it up?" He takes his time with his brewing day and ensures quality and consistency.

Styles such as Kölsch don't have residual sugars or a flood of hops to mask any impurities. Kölsch, as indicated by a decree passed in 1603 that outlawed bottom-fermenting brewing to preserve the brewing tradition and beer quality of Köln in Northern Germany, is a top-fermented beer that is lagered for a short period of time. Simple ingredients such as pils malt and noble hops, leave little room for mistakes. A fully attenuated, crisp, clean, slightly grainy, and a distinguishing vinous character is followed by a firm yet refreshing bitterness. This coupled with the fact that Stereo's Blonde on Blonde, their Kölsch, is not only stylistically correct, but also unblemished, speaks volumes to what Rick stands for. All that's missing is the proper stange and you're in Northern Germany!

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View of tasting room window decals at sunset

Photo by Charlie Perez

If one listens closely, the beer is practically telling its origin. In fact, all beers offered at Stereo are very highly attenuated resulting in virtually no veil for any fault to hide behind.

Other offerings such as Robot, Wall of Sound, and Tales of Brave Ulysses (Imperial Red, Oatmeal Stout, and Scottish Export, respectively) have plenty to talk about as well. These beers are not screaming; they are singing softly from first sip to last. If the expectation is a punch-to-the-face, these beers are underwhelming. Don't misinterpret underwhelming as a put-down as it is indeed a compliment! Not all visitors to Stereo have taken a liking to the set-list (as the product line is referred to on their website). Most often than not, this is due to a lack of understanding of the brewing process and classic styles. "If you come in here and can't find a beer you like, it's probably not the beer's fault," Rick said in response to this. "It just takes some understanding, that's all."

Anyone who loves and appreciates beer owes it to themselves to experience this beginner's brewery first hand. It might even be a learning experience or a good entry point for the novice drinker while providing a refreshing change to the experienced enthusiast. Orange County has some exceptional breweries creating excellent classic beer styles and Stereo is a welcome addition. Listen to some vinyl records from the ever expanding eclectic selection. Step into this underrated brewery's lounge and grab a pint. The beer looks amazing, tastes great, smells fantastic, and feels beautiful. Your beer also has plenty to say. So remember, listen to your beer. Cheers!

Stereo Brewing Company is located on 950 S Via Rodeo in Placentia, CA.

Charlie Perez is a beer enthusiast, a Certified Cicerone®, and is the founder of Terms of Enbeerment (enbeerment.com) where he serves as beer consultant, educator, and writer.



Tasting room minutes after opening its doors opened

Photo by Charlie Perez



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WISFUL DRINKING

CAMRA READY - DOWNING PINTS ACROSS THE POND

By Tomm Carroll

Not unlike Los Angeles, Britain's megalopolis (and capital) London was later than virtually all of the other cities in the United Kingdom to get on the craft beer lorry. But, once on board, it similarly made up for lost time incredibly quickly, and is now an important center for craft breweries and beer bars, as are we.

One huge difference is that London was never a good-beer wasteland, as LA was. Sure, macrobeer dominance, brewery consolidation and pub closures had dumbed down its beer culture in the last half-century or more, but there were always places in the sprawling city to find and enjoy great traditional ale, conditioned in and served from cellar-temperature casks. And for several decades, there has been the Great British Beer Festival to promote, celebrate and indeed award the UK's best beers.

Last month, I was fortunate enough to be invited back a second time to judge and cover GBBF, which celebrated its 40th anniversary. I was also privileged to again attend the British Guild of Beer Writers' Summer Party and pre-GBBF kickoff at Tattershall Castle — a pub/boat docked on the Thames, not far from Parliament and Big Ben, and across the river from the towering London Eye Ferris wheel. In addition, as August marked 10 years since the passing of Michael Jackson (a co-founder of the guild), a moving tribute to "The Beer Hunter" featuring slides, videos and heartfelt reminiscences from Blighty's top beerscribes and publicans, as well as casks of Jackson's favorite real ales — Fuller's Chiswick Bitter and Bateman's XB Pale Ale — preceded the party below the deck.

Jackson's friend, contemporary and acclaimed beer writer Roger Protz hosted the remembrance, and opened by stating, "Michael had done more than any other writer to put beer on the map and to bring it to the attention of a wider audience," adding (not incorrectly), "he influenced the US craft beer revolution." Mark Dorber, a longtime friend and former owner of one of London's best good-beer (cask and keg) pubs, The White Horse in Parsons Green — where Jackson was a fixture — commented, "Michael would be thrilled with his legacy today. He was the Darwin of the beer world." Many other accolades (and downed pints) followed before the party began.

The following morning was the judging for GBBF at the Olympia Exhibition Centre in West Kensington, followed by the trade session (folks in the beer business and media only), with the winning beers announced later that afternoon. The first public session began at 5:00 p.m., followed by four more days of sessions. I was assigned the Strong Bitters category to judge, which also included beers categorized as IPAs and Double IPAs(!). Most of my fellow jurors were seasoned CAMRA members from various regions around the UK.

A little background for the uninitiated: CAMRA, which stands for Campaign for Real Ale, was founded in County Kerry, Ireland in 1971 as a means to promote and save traditional, cask-conditioned ales in the UK and European beer markets from companies then producing low-quality and -flavor kegged ales — hello, Watney's Red Barrel! — as well as to save historical pubs from being closed and sold for their real estate value. CAMRA published its first annual Good Beer Guide in 1974, and in 1977 launched the inaugural GBBF. It remains a vital, if somewhat myopic organization.

So, as you might have guessed, all of the beers in the competition were British-made real ales. In fact, every British ale dispensed at the festival must be cask-conditioned — a tenet that irks many of the new wave of craft breweries that do only keg beer, or very limited cask. Adding insult to injury, the Bières Sans Frontiers section, which includes German, Czech, Belgian, Dutch, Italian, French and Maltese beers, features keg as well as bottled beer. Conversely, US beers were all cask (Sierra Nevada and Brooklyn were the only well-known breweries to send firkins) or bottles (most of which sold out in the first hour or so), and there were also bottles from Australia and New Zealand.

But I digress... The high-abv Bitters (4.5-6.0%) were outnumbered — and mostly outperformed — by the higher-abv IPAs (5.0-7.3%) in the nine-beer flight we judged. In fact, the IPA we near-unanimously awarded our first place was big on tropical-fruity (dry) hop



The author, center, ran into some LA homies at GBBF: MacLeod's Ales Brewing's co-owner Alastair Boase, right, and head brewer David Chaney, who were meeting with the brewers of Partizan Brewing in London's Bermondsey district later that day to discuss a collaboration.

aroma and flavor, but with a streak of welcome bitterness that cut through mid-palate to counteract the impending fruit salad for a balanced finish.

Wow. Definitely not an English-style IPA, and a remarkably pleasant mouthfeel for such a high-hopped beer without forced carbonation. Although it did not place in the championship round, this beer proved a favorite on the floor, and the cask kicked quickly every session. It turned out to be the 5.4% Afghan Pale Ale from Grey Trees Brewing in Aberdare, South Wales.

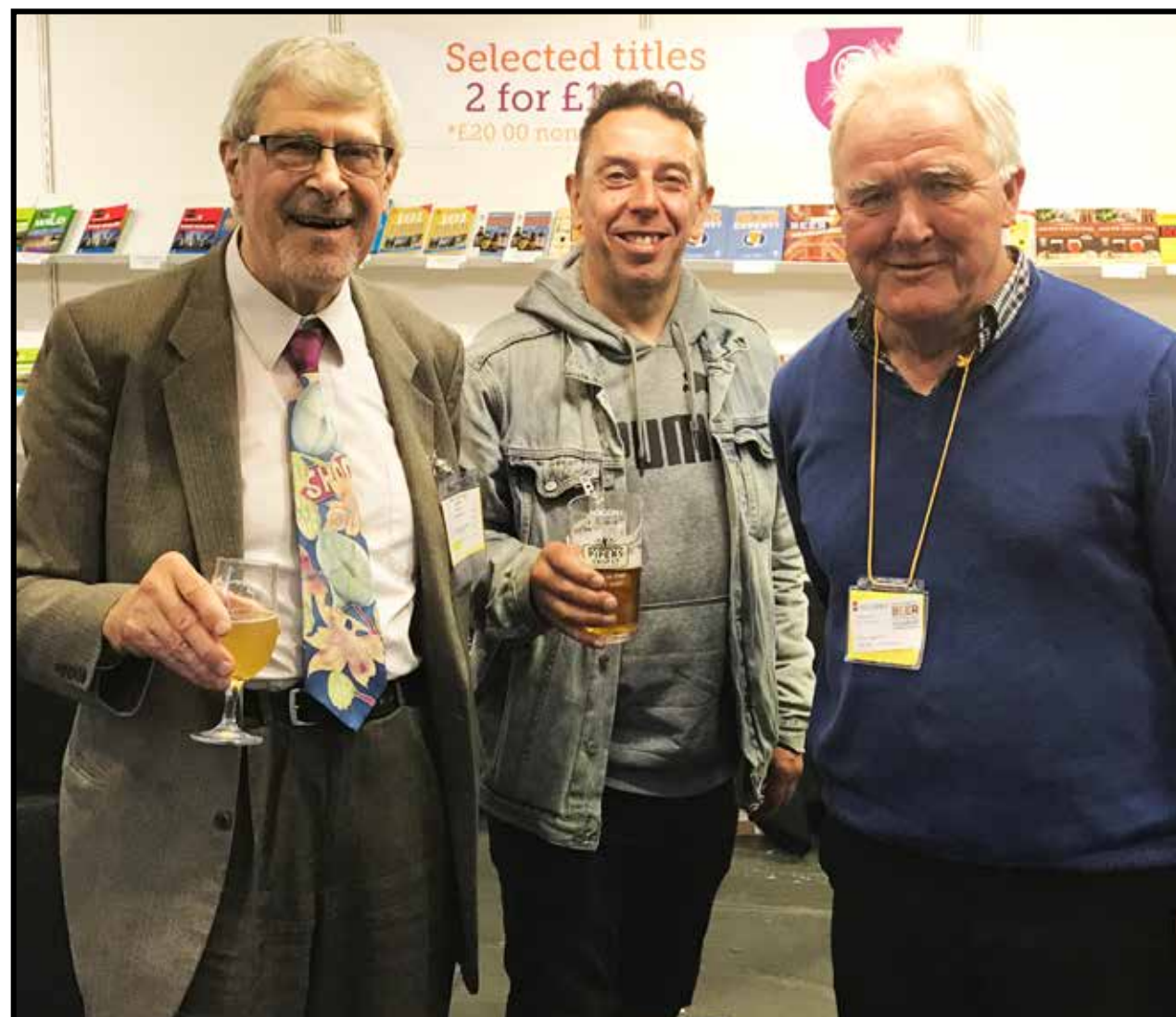
Our silver award went to Red Bull Terrier, a 4.8% full-bodied malty bitter from Barnegates Brewery in Ambleside, Cumbria, while our collective choice for bronze was a dank, boozy (7.0%) but tasty US-style Double IPA called Automaton from Salopian Brewery in Hadnall, Shropshire — another beer that seemingly shouldn't work on cask, but did.

The 2017 Supreme Champion Beer of Britain was a more traditional style, an Ordinary Bitter. The country's highest beer accolade went to Goat's Milk, a nicely balanced 3.8% golden Bitter slightly favoring the hops, from Church End Brewery in Atherstone, Warwickshire.

One of the many new additions to GBBF on its 40th anniversary was the addition of a small, red diamond symbol next to brewery names on the serving booths' banners. Launched by festival co-sponsor SIBA (Society of Independent Brewers), a not-for-profit trade association, the symbol "aims to help beer lovers identify beers which have been brewed by truly independent craft brewers and comes in response to global brewers buying out craft breweries, or releasing so-called 'craft beers' of their own."

Sound familiar? Not too different from our Brewers Association's recently proposed Independent Craft Brewer Seal, is it? I guess it just goes to show that great brewing countries think — and drink — alike. Cheers!

Veteran beer writer Tomm Carroll is a longtime contributor to and the LA correspondent for Celebrator Beer News, and has written about beer for the Los Angeles Times, Ale Street News, West Coaster SoCal and The Daily Breeze, in addition to (slowly) working on a book about the early days of LA breweries. He is also a BJCP-schooled international beer judge and teaches a craft beer class at UCLA Extension (the next one starts September 27 if you're interested). Contact him at beerscribe@earthlink.net.



Noted British beer writers Roger Protz, left, Adrian Tierney-Jones and Tim Hampson at GBBF. Protz and Hampson spoke at the British Guild of Beer Writers' tribute to Michael Jackson on the eve of the festival.



The gold winner in the Strong Bitter category was awarded to the tropically hoppy Afghan Pale Ale from Grey Trees Brewing.



Church end Brewery's Goats Milk Bitter was named GBBF's 2017 Champion Beer of Britain. Photos by Tomm Carroll

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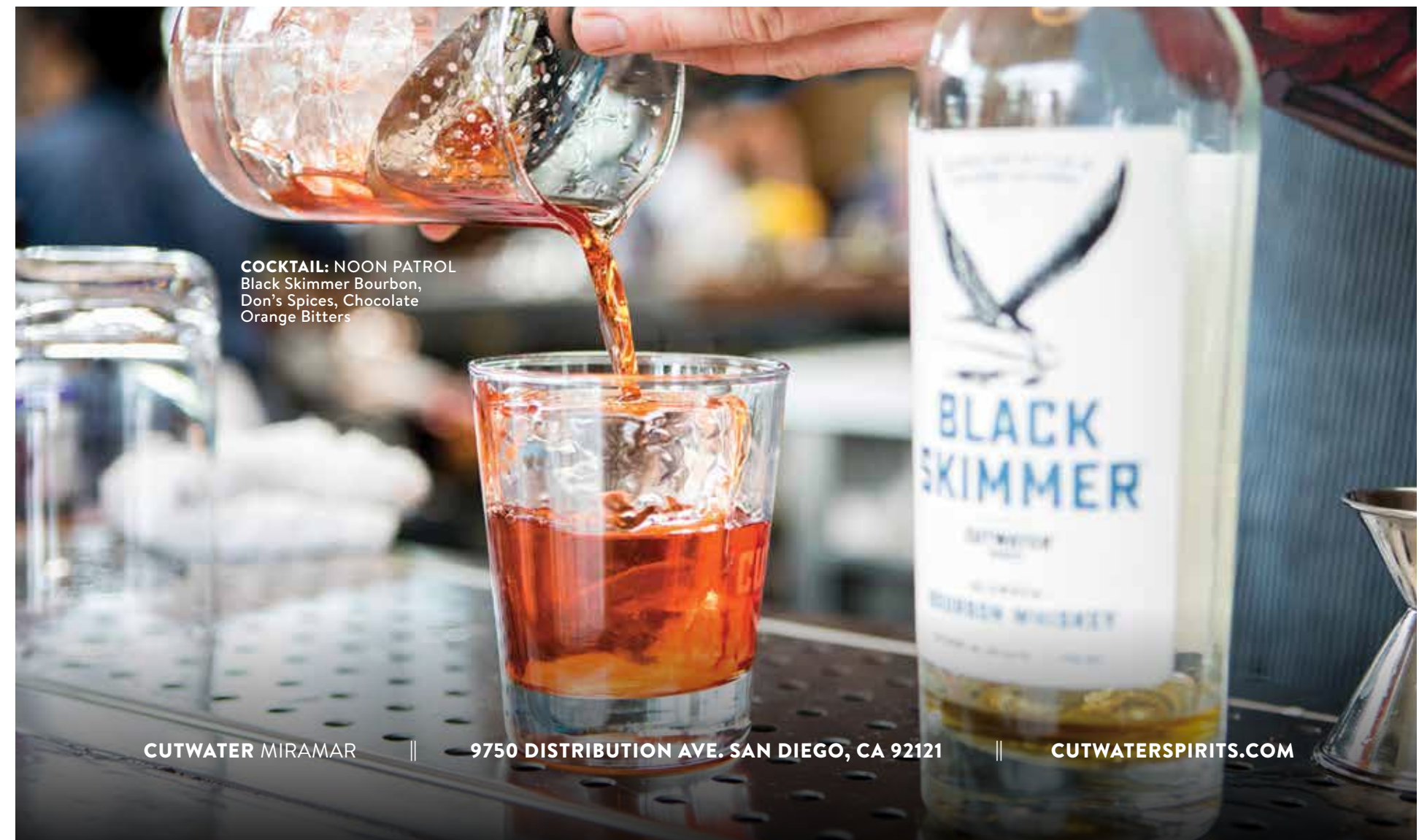
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