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VOLUME 7 | ISSUE 3 | August 2019



## CA Summit Coming to Long Beach

CA Summit in Sacramento

Photo Courtesy of California Craft Brewers Association

Local breweries and beer fans are ecstatic that the state's largest beer festival is to be held in Long Beach next month on Saturday, September 14. The awesome event, featuring 180 California breweries, is put on annually by the California Craft Brewers Association to showcase the brilliance of California brewers. The Summit and festival have always been held in Sacramento, which is home to the CCBA, and has offered the important benefit of allowing State legislators to witness first hand the passion we all have for locally brewed beer. (Full Cover Story on Page 12)

By Daniel Drennon

## INSIDE

EDITORIAL



PAGE 5

PINTS & QUOTES



PAGE 8

YAEGER SHOTS



PAGE 10

INLAND EMPIRE



PAGE 18

7TH ANNIVERSARY



PAGE 22



# CRAFT BEER SUMMIT 2019



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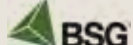


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# BEER PAPER

Beer Paper is dedicated to providing news, commentary and education for the craft beer communities of Los Angeles, Orange County, Inland Empire and Ventura County.

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## EDITORIAL

## BIG BEER

## AN INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE CRAFT BEER INDUSTRY

by Tom McCormick

If you can't beat 'em, buy 'em. That's the strategy "Big Beer" has been taking to continue to play in the craft beer industry.

Will it work? It depends on whether or not you (the beer drinkers) know or care.

Craft beer has grown dramatically over the last several years. What began as an anomaly almost 40 years ago right here in California has now become mainstream. All through the 1980s, many called craft beer a "fad." But craft beer kept on growing. In the '90s, some felt certain it would begin to shrink and fade away with a new generation of beer drinkers moving on to something new. But craft beer kept on growing. Others thought for sure the great recession of 2007-09 would be the demise of high-end beer. But craft beer kept on growing. Craft brewers have revolutionized beer in America and around the world, and corporate brewers got caught with their brewer's boots down.

Throughout the wild run of popularity that craft beer has enjoyed over the years, large global brewers with names like Anheuser-Busch InBev, SABMiller, Constellation and others have dabbled in craft beer with little success. In the early '90s, AB (before being bought by InBev) tried a Sierra Nevada Pale Ale knockoff called Pacific Ridge Pale Ale. The label looked just like Sierra Nevada's Pale Ale and the flavor profile had the distinctive notes of cascade hops. The label had no mention that it was made by Anheuser-Busch. With AB's powerful distribution and a \$4.99 shelf price, we thought it might put a still-young Sierra Nevada Brewing Company out of business. Pacific Ridge flopped. Sierra Nevada Brewing has not.

After that, AB tried putting its identity on high-end brands such as Budweiser American Ale and Budweiser Brew Masters' Private Reserve. Both have been discontinued. MillerCoors dabbled in the craft look-a-like

category with a beer called Colorado Native, also with little luck. More recently, faux-craft brands like Shocktop (AB InBev) and Blue Moon (MillerCoors) have been marginally successful.

So what's a large, global brewer to do when local craft brewers across the country begin to capture the imagination and the wallets of beer drinkers from coast to coast?

Buy 'em!

Consolidation is nothing new to the beer industry. Breweries have been buying breweries for generations. But the modern day Goliath-buying-David trend is different.

With the gradual decline of light, low flavor lagers, Big Beer had to find a way to maintain relevance and growth in the market. Their buying spree started when AB InBev bought Goose Island Brewing, a popular Chicago-based, family-owned brewery in 2011. This is where AB first experimented with their new "take-over formula" in major markets across the country: buy a craft brewery, keep the brewery and tasting room open so it retains its "craft-feel" to the consumer, leave any mention of new ownership off the brand, take one or two of the top selling core brands and brew them at an AB brewery for large-scale efficiency and roll out national distribution through the existing AB distribution network. AB InBev now owns ten craft breweries across the country and MillerCoors, a little slower off the blocks, has partial or full ownership in four.

Should it matter to you? It should if you enjoy walking into your local grocery store or restaurant and having the chance to try a large variety of flavorful, local beers. After all, "choice" is the hallmark of today's beer culture. Prior to the craft brewery revolution, the only "choice" on the shelf was a light, watery pilsner-style lager made by a small handful of national breweries.



Tom McCormick, Executive Director

Photo Courtesy of CCBA

Leading up to Prohibition, large brewers were able to dominate the market by controlling what beer was sold where. Brewers could have partial or full ownership in retail establishments, creating a "tied house" system because the retail location was "tied" to selling only the beers made by the brewer which had ownership in the establishment. This limited consumer choice dramatically.

Post-prohibition, strict laws were implemented that banned the "tied-house" system, eliminating a market where a few large ownership groups could control all beer sales. Unlike before Prohibition, brewing companies could no longer own any part of a retail establishment or provide any kind of inducement to retailers as an incentive to carry their brands.

These "tied house laws" still exist today and have allowed for the craft brewing industry to gain traction and succeed in competition with huge, global beer companies. State and federal alcohol beverage laws do not allow manufacturers to "pay-to-play," meaning they can't pay retailers for tap handle placement or shelf space. Without these important laws, large brewers would be able to out-spend small, craft brewers, eliminating the great choices we have on the shelf today. Equal access laws are mini-anti-trust protections that allow small businesses to compete in a highly competitive industry and marketplace.

Over the last few decades, Big Beer has tried to chip away at tied house

(BIG BEER continued on page 6)



Scott Marks,  
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*All Photos Courtesy of CCBA*

(BIG BEER continued)

laws, hoping to eliminate the protection craft brewers have to grow and sell their beers.

What should you do about it? Know who brews your beer and know who owns your local brewery. Oh, and support the community by doing what you do best: drinking craft beer at the California Craft Beer Summit!

At the Summit, craft beer lovers have the opportunity to truly experience the world of craft beer, from an interactive exposition hall focused on the ingredients of beer and the processes involved in brewing, to advanced tasting classes for beer lovers,

pairing classes for beer chefs and homebrewing classes for new and advanced homebrewers. Plus, the whole event ends in the LARGEST California craft beer festival, with more than 180 California breweries pouring their best beers, some hard-to-find and hard-to-get options and a few special releases. This is your chance to be involved in the community, meet your favorite brewer, talk to HR managers about starting a career in the industry and so much more.

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For tickets and details to the California Craft Beer Summit, please visit [www.cacraftbeersummit.com](http://www.cacraftbeersummit.com). For information on the California Craft Brewers Association, please visit [www.californiacraftbeer.com](http://www.californiacraftbeer.com).

*Tom McCormick is the executive director of the California Craft Brewers Association, the nonprofit trade association representing all of California's craft breweries. Tom has worked in the beer industry since 1982 and has been a key advocate for the craft beer industry since its early years.*



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10  
AUG

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22  
AUG

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## PINTS &amp; QUOTES

# THE TAPS RUN DRY AT ONE OF LA'S LEGENDARY BEER BARS

by John M. Verive

I hope that you're reading this edition of *Beer Paper* in your favorite local beer bar, and I hope that you'll take a moment to appreciate all your favorite things about it — from the lengthy list of local brews on offer, to the friendly faces behind the bar — because you never know when it'll be your last pint in those comfy confines.

Not to be over-dramatic, but we gotta enjoy it while it lasts. The food and beverage business isn't an easy one to succeed in, and the streets of Los Angeles are tougher than most on bars and restaurants. No establishment is immune to the changing whims and trends that sweep through Los Angeles like the winds off the desert, and sudden closures are all too common. The local beer industry is as susceptible as any other to the

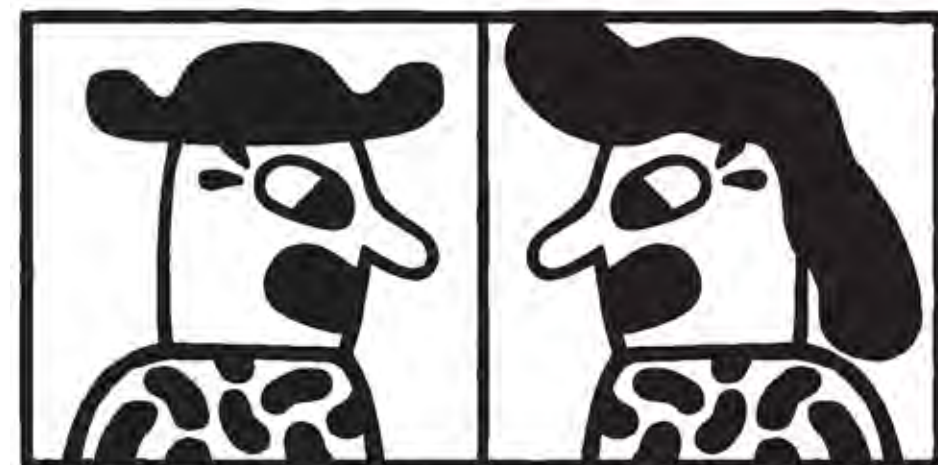
forces financial, political, social and more esoteric that govern the hospitality industry, and as the beer scene matures and settles down after years of explosive growth and feverish enthusiasm, we've begun to see the shutters close on a few local beer businesses. But one announcement on Instagram early last month hit harder than any brewery closure or buyout: Beer Belly, the renowned Koreatown spot that both garnered national notoriety and remained a favorite of local in-the-know beer lovers, was calling it quits after an eight-year run.

It's fitting that I'm writing this eulogy (of sorts) on the first anniversary of the death of Johnathan Gold (legendary Los Angeles food writer). Once a kinda-colleague and always an inspirational figure, I regularly



Beer Belly

Photo Credit: Julie Verive



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turn to J Gold's old reviews when I'm searching for how to say what I need to say, and I've reread his account of the closure of legendary Los Angeles restaurant Campanile four times while working on this piece. I'll let his words break down what Beer Belly was all about in case you are unfamiliar with one of L.A.'s most unique beer bars.

*"Beer Belly seems to specialize in ingenious drunk food, the counter bristles with taps for beers so local that they probably could be delivered on an MTA bus, and you will be tasting several of them before you stagger out the door."* (L.A. Weekly, October 26, 2011)

That was written about five months after Beer Belly opened, back when made-in-L.A. beer was not a common sight on menus. "No one even knew what an IPA was," says Beer Belly's founder Jimmy Han, with only mildly exaggeration. (The first beer served on the draught system? Eagle Rock Brewery's Populist IPA. "I shed a tear of joy," Han said in a tweet.)

After years in the real estate business, and after the calamity of the market's meltdown in 2009, Han says he was looking for a new project and he decided on opening "a little watering hole" where he could interact with the burgeoning beer community and

share his excitement for beer with his neighbors in Koreatown.

While the beer came first at Beer Belly, it was the belly-challenging food from the mind of original chef Wes Lieberher that helped the humble restaurant find a wider audience. "We were super blessed to find Chef Wes," Han says. While Han originally planned to man the grill, he quickly found himself overwhelmed until Lieberher offered his services. The big-flavor, high-calorie fare ("Would your doctor approve? She would not," J Gold warns) gave you a great excuse to order another pint, and fueled by the extravagant food, deftly curated taplist, and Han's own effervescence, Beer Belly became a fixture of the young scene. A regular schedule of special events and beer tapplings cemented the bar's place among L.A.'s best beer destinations.

The beer industry in L.A. matured and Beer Belly grew with it, changing and adapting as palates developed and craft beer flowed into the mainstream. They added a patio, then another. The kitchen experimented with even more wonderfully ridiculous dishes. When the Food Network and Travel Channel invaded the tiny kitchen with their cameras, Beer Belly's identity was challenged. Shows such as *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives* and *Deep Fried*





**Jimmy Han and John Verive**  
Photo Credit: Julie Verive

Paradise exposed a national audience to Beer Belly's signature dishes, and almost instantly, the Death By Duck, Volcano Wings and ubiquitous house-made Beer Whiz were more popular than the beer.

"I felt like we sold out! We were overrun by people who'd come for the food and who didn't care about the beer," Han says, but he soon saw an opportunity in the new influx of customers. "I realized it was a lot of people to educate, and that is exactly what we wanted to be doing!" This illustrates what made Beer Belly so special: Han's unwavering excitement for beer and drive to help build a robust beer culture in his native Los Angeles. He resists taking credit for Beer Belly's success, pointing instead to Chef Wes, or his dedicated staff,

or the brewers making the beer he was pouring, but it was Jimmy Han's magnetism and heart that pumped life into Beer Belly. "It was a project that succeeded because of creativity and collaboration," he says.

Today, beer drinkers are spending more time (and more money) in brewery tasting rooms, and the beer bars are struggling to stay relevant with the ever flighty consumer base whose eyes are always on the next new thing. Han says the Koreatown restaurant was still profitable at the end ("which makes what I'm doing even crazier," he jokes), but he was hesitant to make more changes to Beer Belly in the name of improved efficiency and profitability. "Sometimes it's easier just to start with a blank slate," he says. "I felt like we achieved what we set out to do."

Han never wanted to build a bar that would be open forever or to become one those legacy bars that every beer city has like Tornado in San Francisco or Hamilton's Tavern in San Diego or Horse Brass Pub in Portland. He had a 10-year plan for Beer Belly, but the time was right for the next thing in Koreatown. "There are a lot of other things that I want to do too, and this is the right opportunity to take a leap



**Beer Belly Facade**

Photo Credit: Julie Verive

of faith," he says, adding: "I'm sad to see it go, of course, but I'm also really, really excited for what's next."

While he didn't give any hints as to what that might be, I would wager that beer fans won't be without some compelling reason to visit 532 S Western Ave for long.

*(Editor's Note: If you are as sad as we are about losing Beer Belly in Koreatown, please note Han's second*

*Beer Belly location in downtown Long Beach remains open.)*

*John Verive is a 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). Find him on Twitter and Instagram at @octopushat and @beeroftomorrow.*

## YAEGER SHOTS

## VENTURA'S GOOD FORTUNE = GOOD BEERS

by Brian Yaeger



Brewmaster Dan White opening fermenter

Photo Credit: Derek Street

Ventura's full name, Buenaventura, translates to good fortune, and beer-loving locals have to agree as the city with 110,000 residents now has a brewery population in the double digits. And while downtown encompasses just 15 city blocks, that's where four of them are clustered. The granddaddy, Anacapa, is a brewpub established in the year 2000. The constellation's newest, Leashless, opened in 2017. A year earlier, Kyle Thille founded Ventura Coast Brewing and hired Dan White to be the head brewer. White, previously of Smog City in Torrance, was all too happy to move out of L.A. and up the coast with his wife (and their bulldog). That's one of the beauties of the city: it's not in Los Angeles, but for a city defined by sprawl, it practically is. To find out more about how Venturans drink and think about their local scene, I grilled White.

**Beer Paper: Do you think of Ventura as having more of Northern Los Angeles identity in line with the 818, or is it firmly part of the 805?**

White: I see Ventura as definitely owning the 805 identity despite its proximity to LA. Ventura is far more laid back than LA but has much more of a working class vibe than Santa Barbara.

**BP: Are you more apt to hang out for a day north at Carpinteria's breweries (brewLAB, Island, Rincon) or over the Conejo Grade at Westlake's (Ladyface, Five Threads, 14 Cannons)?**

White: I'm more apt to head north and hit up the breweries in SB County and up into Buellton.

**BP: What does Ventura's double-digit breweries say about the seaside city's beer culture? And do you describe it as pretty typical or unique for California?**

White: The city's beer culture has lagged behind that of LA and the rest of SoCal and is just now starting to catch up. I think the recent increase has created more competition amongst the local breweries, which is driving the quality of beer up. I think our beer culture is pretty typical for California. IPA is still king despite a big uptick in lager drinkers, and of course hazies are all the rage right now.

**BP: Seaward Brewing just opened and Transmission is opening any minute now. Any chance Ventura becomes the Bend or Ashland of SoCal, where the brewery population booms to twenty-plus?**

White: I think we are definitely in our "boom" phase right now with so

many new breweries opening in the last few years, but I think you could say that about a lot of cities across the country. I think we have been playing catch up the last few years and we should see a leveling off soon. Tap handles in Ventura are becoming more competitive but more taps are being dedicated to local breweries and the competition is driving the quality up. I am friends with Seaward founder Jason Henry who was an awesome home brewer and not much was lost in translation moving from 15-gallon to 3-barrel batches.

**BP: How many customers are local versus how many are from LA, OC, SD and looking for smaller beer scenes outside their neighborhoods?**

White: Ninety percent of our customers are locals that we see at least once a week, but we also get a lot of people in town on vacation from all

over who are seeking out the local beer scene. Recently, I've noticed more people coming up from L.A. and down from SB to brewery hop in Ventura now that we have the brewery density. You can now do a brewery walking tour in downtown without breaking a sweat.

**BP: With some IPAs and fruit sours on Ventura Coast's current board, are those prevalent styles or do customers drink their way across the spectrum?**

White: Our customers definitely drink their way across the spectrum. Typically we have our five core beers (Resinite IPA, Neighborhood Pale Ale, VCBC Light Lager, Cinco de Cuatro amber lager, Arctic Haze hazy IPA) and we rotate our other five taps between all kinds of styles. I try to always have a rotating Pilsner, West Coast IPA, and hazy IPA on and also rotate in seasonal beers that are usually

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Cinco de Cuatro Mexican Amber Lager



Arctic Haze Hazy IPA  
Photos By Derek Street

stouts, traditional lagers, or Belgian styles as well as fruited sours, both on tap and in bottles.

**BP:** *Surrounding Ventura, there are small, experimental breweries like Ojai Brewing, brewLAB, and Smoke Mountain. Have you brewed herbal, forage-y type beers at VCBC and if so, how do your customers respond? Or, on the flipside, would you like to see more traditional lagers gain traction? Are the people who drink your light and black lager the same ones who are drinking your hazy IPA and fruit sour beers?*

White: We haven't gotten into the foraged/herbal beers but were not counting them out either. The closest thing would be our Hibiscus Belgian wheat beer brewed with jasmine rice (SnapDragon), which is a seasonal favorite that we rotate in during the warmer months. That being said, I'm a huge fan of traditional lagers, specifically pilsners, and always try to have one on tap. I stray away a bit from tradition by dry-hopping mine, but still seek out the clean fermentation characteristic and refreshing herbal notes from traditional German and Czech

hops. While there is definitely a younger crowd that comes in specifically seeking out hazy IPAs and sours, a majority of our customers are jumping all over the board from light lager to hazy and everything in between.

**BP:** *When you're beach-bound, what crowler of VCBC beer do you take with you? What crowler would you fill from one of the other breweries in town?*

White: I grew up in the Venice/Santa Monica area I have always spent a lot of time in the ocean. I'm more of a body boarder. For a pre-surf beer I would stick with a pilsner or VCBC Light, but post surf would be a Resinite IPA all day. If I was filling from another local I would probably go with Institution's Rx Pils pre-surf and a Topa Topa's Chief Peak IPA post-surf.

*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, where he's teaching UCSB's first beer-tasting class.*



Brewmaster Dan White  
Photo Credit: Nate Garcia

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## COVER STORY

## CA SUMMIT COMING TO LONG BEACH!

by Daniel Drennon

Local breweries and beer fans are ecstatic that the state's largest beer festival is to be held in Long Beach next month on Saturday, September 14. The awesome event, featuring 180 California breweries, is put on annually by the California Craft Brewers Association to showcase the brilliance of California brewers. The Summit and festival have always been held in Sacramento, which is home to the CCBA, and has offered the important benefit of allowing State legislators to witness first hand the passion we all have for locally brewed beer. Thanks to the Sacramento Convention Center being remodeled, CCBA selected the gorgeous Marina Green Park waterfront location in Long Beach to host this year's festival.

California leads the nation with over 1000 breweries who provide over \$8 billion to the state's economy. The industry provides over 54,000 jobs statewide.

I asked Tom McCormick, CCBA Executive Director, to tell us why hosting the Summit and festival in Long Beach is such a nice perk for local beer fans.

**DRENNON:** Please give our readers a quick synopsis of the California Craft Brewers Association.

McCORMICK: The CCBA is the statewide trade association representing the craft brewing industry in California. We provide a wide range of benefits and services to our members and host multiple events and conferences each year. Our primary function and mission is to serve as a legislative advocate at the state Capitol, acting as a single unified voice at all levels of policymaking.

**DRENNON:** We have eclipsed 1000 breweries in the state. Is that much growth over such a short span of time (we have doubled in six years) good or bad? Or perhaps better to ask what is good about it? And what is bad about it? Are there any "dangers" to it?

McCORMICK: It is good because it means more variety and choice



2018 Summit Beer Festival in Sacramento

Photo Credit: Taras Garcia

for the consumer. It also offers more locations for beer enthusiasts to visit a brewery tap room and enjoy fresh beer. It's good because it adds more jobs and provides more taxes to our state. It's good because it promotes "beer tourism" and maintains California as the premier craft beer state in the country. It's also good because competition forces everyone to strive for excellence. The danger is really only to those who don't make good beer, provide good service and aren't careful on how they finance and run their day-to-day business operations. The danger is that the popularity attracts people who either get in for the wrong reason (just to make money) or who don't have the skills to run a

viable business operation. This can cause mediocre products and service which reflect poorly on the industry as a whole.

**DRENNON:** What about the notion of a bubble bursting and/or the pie being sliced too thin?

McCORMICK: We are not in a "bubble" and the pie is pretty darn big here in California. There is room for more breweries, but it is a tough, hard and competitive business. You won't get rich and you will work harder than you ever have, but it will fuel your passion if that is indeed your passion. We are seeing a significant uptick in brewery closings which is a natural and healthy weeding of the herd.

**DRENNON:** What advice would you give to prospective brewery owners in 2019?

McCORMICK: It's a lot harder than it looks. Owning and running any small business in this state is very hard. The alcohol beverage business is one of the most regulated industries out there and it is very challenging to learn and know all the regulations a brewery must conform to. It is also becoming hyper-competitive, far more than it ever has been. The days of starting a small brewing business and growing it into a large company with multi-state distribution are long gone. If you are thinking of starting a brewery, be prepared to work very, very hard and potentially lose a lot of money.

**DRENNON:** You've updated your treatise on "Big Beer" from our August 2016 issue and it reappears in this issue. What are the key changes, if any, in their strategy to undermine independent breweries?




McCORMICK: The buying frenzy by Big Beer to acquire craft breweries has slowed as they wait and see how this new competitive era evolves. Big Beer also has a new fascination with cannabis and has placed their bet on that industry through acquisitions. Other than that, little has changed.

**DRENNON:** Can you confirm whether big beer engages in unfair business practices to gain competitive advantage over small independents, whether that is simply lowering keg and package prices to levels that indies can't match and still survive... or even more nefarious practices?

McCORMICK: I've been in the craft brewing industry for 36 years and one thing has never changed; big beer companies have far more leverage in the market place and they know how to use it to their advantage. They continue to try to erode important tied house laws in order to legalize inducements to retailers. This is something we work very hard on defending at the state Capitol each year. I am very concerned that big beer may lower prices on their "faux craft" brands to intentionally undercut smaller independent craft

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Exhibitor interactive display at the Summit Expo

Photo Credit: Taras Garcia

brewers. This could marginalize the craft segment which they hope will reinvigorate their core brands.

**DRENNON:** Do you think we need a new term to replace “craft” now that Big Beer has obfuscated, if not outright stolen the term?

McCORMICK: I do, but I don’t know what that new term is. “Craft” has become a bit like “all natural” in the food products category. I think a new term will emerge. Hopefully soon.

**DRENNON:** How can we all do a better job of educating beer drinkers about the importance of supporting independent breweries?

McCORMICK: When I started selling craft beer in the early 1980’s it was a hard sell. Even a basic pale ale was foreign to most people because it had so much flavor and color compared to what everyone was drinking at the time. It was a slow and time-consuming process, explaining to each new account what authentic beer was. Every new customer had to be taught. We have to get back to that mindset, selling beer by telling the story of who we are as an industry and why it’s important to support local businesses. Brewery sales people have to understand this before they can teach it. It is critically important that craft brewers don’t get sucked into the easy route of selling beer as just another commodity rather than selling an authentic story.

**DRENNON:** Let’s get back to more positive news. California’s breweries provide over \$8 billion to the State’s economy and account for over 54,000 jobs. How does the CCBA promote that to legislators and help protect the autonomy and rights of our one thousand independent breweries?

McCORMICK: The CCBA office is down the street from the state Capitol and we are constantly in the Capitol meeting with legislators and staffers to educate them on how important the craft brewing industry is to the state’s economy. We conduct beer tastings for policymakers and we invite them

(COVER STORY continued on page 14)

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(COVER STORY continued)

to our events. We also encourage our members to invite their political representatives to their brewery and show them firsthand what a craft brewery is and looks like and the many benefits of our industry. One “benefit” is that craft brewers are horribly inefficient. This means they employ a lot of people. By our calculations, craft brewers in California make about 186 barrels (32 gallons per barrel) of beer per employee compared to the two Anheuser-Busch breweries in California which produce about 5,860 barrels of beer per employee.

**DRENNON:** *Here in the greater Los Angeles and Orange County area, we have all been elated since you announced the annual CCBA Summit Festival was to be held in Long Beach this year. How, when and why did you decide on Long Beach and how many years can we expect to be the lucky host city?*

**McCORMICK:** From the first year of the Summit we have wanted to bring it down to our family in Southern California. We started in Sacramento because for a first year event it was easier to execute in our home town. We also had a huge benefit to have the Summit literally across the street from



LABG booth at the 2018 Summit Expo Hall

Photo Credit: Taras Garcia

the state Capitol in the Sacramento Convention Center. When the City of Sacramento announced plans to temporarily close the Convention Center for two years for renovation we were given the wonderful opportunity to move the Summit south. We will be in Long Beach for at least two years. We will decide the location of the 2021 Summit after our first year in Long Beach.

**DRENNON:** *How many breweries will serve beer at the festival and what makes it such a special event?*

**McCORMICK:** There will be 180 different breweries pouring at the Summit Festival this year. It is a very unique event in many ways. There are breweries from every corner of the state attending. Many of these breweries don't participate in beer festivals outside their local region so there will be beers from highly acclaimed breweries that you would not typically see at a beer festival in southern California. And being that it is a fundraiser for their trade association, the brewers love to bring special beers that you would not

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Tap Talk stage with Greg Koch, Stone Brewing, at the 2018 Summit Expo  
Photo Credit: Taras Garcia

normally find on supermarket shelves or at local tap houses. The setting is unique in itself, with the Long Beach harbor and sandy beach just yards from the event.

**DRENNON:** Where do you see "California Craft" in ten years?

**McCORMICK:** The California craft scene will be just as vibrant and diverse as it is today, if not more so.

The laws will change over the next ten years to allow breweries, wineries and distilleries to all be on the same licensed premise (this practice of combining alcohol manufacturing licenses under one roof is currently now allowed). Cannabis will be a player as well with cannabis consumption allowed at brewery tap rooms. Overall there will be

(COVER STORY continued on page 17)

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2018 Summit Beer Festival

Photo Credit: Taras Garcia

(COVER STORY continued)

much more comingling of products. Consumers will also have much greater access to home delivery and be able to access massive catalogs of craft beer brands which will be delivered directly to your door. There will be new styles that we cannot even imagine right now (who would have thought of hazy IPA just three years ago?). There will always be an appetite for gathering with friends

over a pint of beer in a casual, friendly atmosphere, so brewery tap rooms will still be widely prominent and popular. "Big Beer" will always find some new gimmick product to sell, but iconic brands like Bud, Miller High Life and Coors Light will be on the sidelines. Craft market share will exceed 50%. Most importantly, there will be well over 1,000 breweries across the state, each one providing jobs, paying taxes and keeping dollars local. Long live California Craft!

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INLAND EMPIRE

# SKYLAND ALE WORKS A SMALL BREWERY DOING BIG THINGS

by Andrew Smith



Jim Beyers & Brad Nixon

Photo Credit: Shelley Smith

Corona holds a fond place in my early beer hunting memory. Twenty years ago, Main Street Brewery was one of the few places I could fill up a growler on my drives from Los Angeles to Palm Springs. The migration inland has seen both a population and a craft beer boom. Like a few of its inland neighbors, the Corona beer scene has become rather significant.

Opened in 2014, Skyland Ale Works was the city's first standalone brewery. There was a TAPS restaurant/brewery, while Main Street closed briefly before reopening earlier this year. Now, there's Stone Church and Storytellers, with Evans almost completing their move from Irvine to Corona. Still of modest size, Skyland has made some positive and progressive moves in its four-year existence. They've relocated to a bigger facility, their beers are

highly rated, and they've been playing with some innovative ideas.

The founders, Jim Beyers and Ken Penrose, started homebrewing at Beyers' Crestline cabin. "Crestline used to be known as Skyland Ranch, and we became known as the guys from Skyland," Beyers informed me. Having co-navigated the early success, Penrose left in 2018, opening the door for current partner, Brad Nixon. Nixon was also a multi-award-winning homebrewer, notably taking Best of Show for his Schwarzbier at Hangar 24 in 2013. After spending a few frustrating years planning his own brewery, he'd given up hope when Beyers called.

Skyland's model has been one of steady, organic growth. They brewed 268 barrels in 2018, sold almost



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entirely through the taproom. This year should see them pass 350 barrels, a 30% increase. “I’m not looking to set the world on fire and become the next Hangar 24,” explained Beyers. “We’re not going to get rich doing it, but I think our size is the only way to succeed in today’s market,” added Nixon.

They outgrew their original 1,400 square-foot unit within two years, a unit now occupied by Storytellers. The new facility, just across the parking lot, is 4,000 square feet inside with a 2,400 square-foot patio. It was the patio that sold it for Beyers, a patio that has become a lively weekend and late-night entertainment spot. They’ve also expanded to a 7-barrel brew system.

The menu shows Nixon’s affinity for solid, classic styles, alongside a couple of anomalies. Of sixteen taps, four are mainstays: Agave Wheat, Honey Blonde, Gaslamp IPA, and a rotating Pale Ale series. Nixon likes lagers with five on tap, all perfectly executed, the Vienna and Maibock standing out. They were also pouring a Coffee Porter, a Hazy IPA, and a Brut IPA. Also on tap were Kaos and Control, two beers that I’ll get to shortly.

They do brew bigger styles, like the recently finished Baltic Porter, a 4th Anniversary Barleywine, and a greatly anticipated Double IPA named “CitraDIPAty.” Two of their popular beers, Anahammer (a chili-infused IPA) and the Chocolate Porter, have won Bronze and Silver respectively at the LA International. Jim takes particular pride in the Porter, that being his first all-grain recipe. But it was a couple of more recent beer developments that convinced us to visit Skyland.

Late last year, Beyers was diagnosed with celiac disease. He became the brewer that couldn’t enjoy his own beer and couldn’t even be in the

brewhouse on brew days. Not to be deterred, he jumped right into gluten-free brewing. The FDA defines gluten-free as containing no gluten-base and testing below 20 parts per million (ppm). It’s a number that isn’t universally agreed upon, many opting for a lower threshold of 5 ppm. Gluten-reduced beer, barley-based beer with a clarifying enzyme, has become common. Gluten-free beer is more of a rarity, especially in the craft industry. One week prior to our interview, Beyers celebrated his millet-based Vienna lager testing below 5 ppm. It was lagering during our visit but tasted great. With two dedicated taps, he’s planning a gluten-free Saison next. He’s already received great response to the program: “People have told me they’ll be here all the time once we get them on.”

Another exciting development was an experiment named Kaos and Control, brewed in collaboration with Chris Anderson of John Fearless Craft Hops & Provisions. Control was the base beer, while Kaos had wet hop terpene extract added before packaging. Anderson commented: “to our knowledge, this has never been done.” He was working with an east coast lab that has proprietorship on a process that extracts the terpenes during drying, still yielding usable hop pellets. The terpenes, in this case, came from fresh Zeus, Nugget, and Cascade hops.

Control was a complex hop medley of Medusa, Amarillo, Idaho 7, Southern Passion, and African Queen, showing lots of tropical fruit, citrus, and spice. Kaos had that same depth plus more. It was slicker in the mouthfeel, with fresh tropical fruit, a little more pepper, and an accentuated herbal aroma. “Kaos was a fun experiment,” enthused Nixon, “we were lucky to have Chris supply the hops and the extract.”



Kaos and Control

Photo Credit: Shelley Smith



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**Skyland Taproom**

*Photo Credit: Shelley Smith*

With gluten-free beers and terpene extracts, Skyland is breaking new ground. But, as Beyers and Nixon both reiterated, they're just about "making solid beer." Furthermore, growth is organic rather than strategic. They have some kegs out in the community but have neglected to follow up on many inquiries due to their commitments and focus at the brewery. Both partners come from high earning backgrounds, which may contradict their modesty, but could also explain it. It's a passion for the craft, rather than ambition, that drives them.

As Nixon explained, "I got into the business because I felt like I was born to do it. If I didn't, I'd regret it for the rest of my life. I like the work. I really enjoy brewing and making sure everything's right. The solitude is therapeutic. The pride comes from people coming in and paying money for something I've put my blood, sweat, and tears into."

"As long as you have the passion, you'll get the satisfaction," added Beyers. "Passion got me into the business and it's still there today. I'd still fight to be on the brew deck if I could. The reception to the gluten-free program has given me an even stronger drive."

As for local competition and the possibility of Corona becoming too concentrated? Both disagreed: "We haven't even reached the potential of what we can do here locally," insisted Nixon, "things are going to get better. The new breweries will be better for everyone."

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



**Jim Beyers**

*Photo Credit: Shelley Smith*



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## 11 QUESTIONS WITH LA BEER HOP

by Daniel Drennon

Hal and Cindy Mooney founded their most excellent brewery tour business seven years ago this month, so happy anniversary. Way, way back then (in the reality world of the LA craft beer scene at the time) there were barely enough breweries to comprise a “tour.” Nowadays, they operate three tour vehicles and employ a half dozen “beer/brewery expert” drivers, eight if you include them.

As people and personalities, Hal and Cindy make me use an adjective I may have never used before, primarily because I am not your favorite grandmother. That is to say, they are delightful.

The super fun (and funny) husband and wife team jointly emcee everyone’s favorite LA Beer Week event, “Eagle Rock Brewery’s Battle of the Bands.” So, rest assured, they do one helluva job emceeing your private or public brewery tour. On top of that, they are both cicerones, so they know beer!

I recently hopped on the Hop to experience their Long Beach brewery tour for this interview.

**DRENNON: Obvious first question – How and when did you get the idea for LA Beer Hop?**

HAL: It was February in 2012. Cindy and I went on a San Diego beer tour for her brother’s 30th birthday and at the end of it I drunkenly bought a bunch of domain names for what became LA Beer Hop. Then I sold my car, bought a bus and after a bunch of permitting, a handful of licenses,

getting insurance and other stuff, I did our first tour in August of 2012. It was a group of six people that was organized by a friend of my family who heard I was starting this business. We went to Monkish, Strand and El Segundo. It was great. I did tours on nights and weekends for the first year.

**DRENNON: Hal, you actually took a job running a beer program for a pizza franchise while running LA Beer Hop at the same time. Can you tell me about that experience?**

HAL: I was the “Beer Chef” / Beverage Director / Certified Cicerone® for MidiCi the Neapolitan Pizza company for a couple years.

I got to launch and manage beer programs in 16 different states as their company grew from one location in Sherman Oaks to 80 franchise locations nationwide. The job ended about a year and a half ago, but it was a such a great experience to see what craft beer looked like and what beer meant to people in super different parts of the country and ultimately, I learned that some people can’t even imagine a beer program that doesn’t have a couple of macro industrial lagers on it. What beer you drink, whether it’s craft or not, is a part of a person’s identity that runs real deep.

**DRENNON: How have you seen the LA/OC beer scene evolve over your first seven years?**

HAL: Oh man, in every way imaginable, good and bad. The beer has gotten way better and occasionally way worse. There’s been an influx



Hal & Cindy hosting the Battle of the Bands

Photo Credit: Matthew Garcia @MomentsInBeer

of even more amazing people, and there have been some people who I wouldn’t call bad, but maybe that they just don’t have their interests aligned with the rest of the beer community. My favorite thing is probably that the foundation that LA Beer was built on is still present. These have been some golden years and I hope that everyone sticks around while the initial excitement dims and whatever else happens over the next few years.

**DRENNON: What’s the best thing about the insane number of breweries that have opened?**

HAL: We’ve been able to see firsthand that every person, even the “I only drink wine” people, can have a favorite beer. It’s also true that everyone can have a favorite brewery and with so many breweries in LA, there are more chances for people to find a favorite. Every brewery in LA is, or should be, trying to provide something of value that someone will love so much that it will make it their favorite brewery. That can be an amazing space, killer service, brand details, great beer or anything thoughtful. Ideally, it will be a few of those things, but some breweries knock out every category.

CINDY: More people know that there is beer being made in LA! Maybe one opens in your neighborhood and someone finds out about it, they bring their friends and then they obviously

talk about what other breweries they have been to, and then the word spreads and you get more craft beer into people’s hands.

**DRENNON: As experts, do you see any danger to the explosive growth in SoCal and beyond?**

HAL: Of course, there’s danger. And thank you for calling us experts. The big risk is turning people off to craft beer in general because of a specific bad experience. The best way to mitigate that risk is to have insanely well-trained staff. People can fix a bad experience. People can fix a scenario in which a guest didn’t like their beer. Also, what’s up with all the water squeeze bottles that have popped up at breweries lately? Totally unnecessary, looks weird from the guests’ perspective, and I’ve seen more than a few bartenders squeeze the water right on top of the beer to knock some foam off.

**DRENNON: You must have seen and heard it all driving groups of beer drinkers all over LA. Do you have a favorite and/or funniest story you can share?**

HAL: It’s terrible, but one of the funniest things is when a girl surprises her boyfriend or husband with a beer tour for their birthday. Nine times out of ten, that guy is not happy for the first hour of the tour. He’s just sitting



Cindy Mooney

Photo Credit: Matthew Garcia @MomentsInBeer



Hal Mooney

Photo Credit: Matthew Garcia @MomentsInBeer

in the front row surrounded by super excited friends and family trying to figure out what's happening. I had a guy on a tour once who thought he was going pants shopping, but instead got surprised with a beer tour and he spent the first hour just fixated on, "but when am I going to get my khakis?"

CINDY: We've seen a lot. Met a lot of nice people. Have a lot of returning guests, which is surprising, but, one thing that I never would have guessed would be the amount of tears. I mean, it happens VERY rarely, but I think it takes a lot to get a group together to do something like this and when you really want to make sure everyone is having a good time it can get emotional especially when alcohol is involved. So, I've spent some time in bathrooms hugging some crying birthday girl making sure they are okay so we can continue the tour. Don't worry It always works out.

**DRENNON:** *You told me it is important to "Know your audience." Please explain.*

HAL: That's such a big topic. I think we were talking about Iron Triangle and why they closed. LA Beer Hop brought a lot of groups into that space during the life of their business and the response was always the same "Wow, it's beautiful in here". Which it was, but they never found an audience to fill that space. I mean, Iron Triangle closed for a lot of other reasons, but not finding and connecting to an audience was one of them. El Segundo, on the other hand, knows who is buying their beer, why they are buying it, and what else they could be buying. And that's evident in their rollout of the Slice & Pint, which is totally on brand, connects with their existing audience and then grows their audience. How are you ever going to meet the needs of your customers if you don't know who they are and what they need?

**DRENNON:** *What is your favorite thing about surprisingly tight-knit LA/OC beer community?*

CINDY: The support that everyone shows each other. We get to bring people to a lot of breweries every week and I love when someone at one brewery

tells me to say hi to someone else at the next brewery I'm heading to. Beer people are passionate people who really care about what they are doing, and that brings people and communities together. That's important in such a huge city like LA.

**DRENNON:** *You two emcee the Battle of the Bands each year and, gotta be honest, you're damn funny and entertaining. Where did that skill set come from?*

CINDY: That's very generous. It's from growing up doing theater for sure. Hal and I actually met in the Theater department at LMU. I was assistant directing a show he was in (Glengarry Glen Ross) and he made me laugh every day. Hal is just naturally funny and entertaining whether he's onstage or just talking to you in someone's living room. But we are both comfortable on stage from years of theater and then of course leading beer tours all the time. The Battle of the Bands is our favorite beer event and we feel very lucky to be a part of it, we look forward to it every year.

**DRENNON:** *I am sure there has been a learning curve as a small business owner. What's the most important lesson you have learned?*

HAL: Being self-employed is great. You set your own hours and you get to "be your own boss", but really, your boss is every guest, your boss is all of your Beer Guides, your boss is the guy who parks his car in front of the gate at your parking lot at 12:30 am on a Saturday night and you have to figure out what to do.

**DRENNON:** *Where do you see yourselves and LA Beer Hop in ten years?*

HAL: As long as the breweries in LA are open, making good beer, and maintaining interesting spaces to visit, I think we'll have a business. There also needs to be 30th birthday parties and tourists in Los Angeles in order for us to have a business. We've been really lucky to be able to grow with the beer community here and we hope to continue to be a part of wherever LA beer goes.

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