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## TRADEMARK APPROVED



Sterling and Ilana with the mash filter

Photo Courtesy of Trademark Brewing

by Daniel Drennon

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*Then, imagine if you will, you get hit with a pandemic that shuts you down during your first year. Even in the best of times, it is a daunting task for a new brewery to build their customer base and pay what is usually a*

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*Talk about having to have resiliency and, quite honestly, flat out courage.*

*But Sterling and Ilana are made of the right stuff to survive and even thrive.*

*They built a large, spacious production brewery at a time when others were hedging their bets and going small. They made a commitment to make Trademark a state-of-the-art environmentally-friendly brewery that protects precious resources like*

*energy and water.*

*And when COVID did hit, and hit hard, they saw an opportunity to serve their local community by making hand sanitizer for first responders and health care professionals.*

*[full cover story online]*

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## COVER STORY

## TRADEMARK APPROVED

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Trademark's storefront at night

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Beach. The couple went on an insane multi-year roller coaster of bureaucracy, construction and endless challenges before finally getting their gorgeous brewery open in the summer of 2019.

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protects precious resources like energy and water.

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**DRENNON:** *First, let's get personal if you don't mind. Where did each of you grow up, how and when did you meet, and how long have you been married.*

STERLING: I grew up in LA, and Ilana is from the northern suburbs of Chicago. We met in July, 2013 and have been married for almost 5 years now.

**DRENNON:** *What were you each doing previous to making the decision to drop those jobs and open a brewery?*

STERLING: I was a professional photographer for about 20 years before getting into beer. That career started as a hobby as well – I really enjoyed the blend of art and science – very similar to brewing. Ilana is the Master

All Photos Courtesy of Trademark Brewing

of Hospitality – she was with Ritz-Carlton / Marriott for about 10 years, operating hotels in New York, LA and Cabo.

**DRENNON:** *When did you start brewing? How long was it before you thought you could go pro? And how difficult was it to acclimate to your brewhouse jumping straight from homebrewing?*

STERLING: Oh man, that was ages ago. I attended a “how to brew” workshop on a Wednesday evening at Culver City Homebrew. That was back in 2008, and we made a hefeweizen. I distinctly remember Greg joking about the tiny hop addition. A short while later, I brewed my first beer with the basic bucket starter kit from the Woodland Hills Home Wine, Beer and Cheesemaking Shop (I lived in the Valley at the time and I'll be a Maltose Falcon for life). The first beer was really successful – the second...not so much. Anyhow, per usual I jump into hobbies headfirst and before long I had a dozen carboys going at any given time. The transition to “going pro” on the brewing side was really fun, and

I'm thankful to have had the benefit of hands-on experience with trusted friends (shout out to Kip and the LA Ale Works crew!). I'm a process-driven individual so stepping from buckets and extract to all-grain and the BrewMagic and eventually to a mash filter was a fun progression. The beer keeps getting better and my back hurts less!

**DRENNON:** *Ilana. I saw that you got your degree in Hospitality Administration at Boston University and spent ten years in the high-end hotel business. So, it would seem running a brewery falls within your field of expertise. What lessons have you learned so far?*

ILANA: Absolutely. I have always worked in hospitality and it laid a solid foundation for the brewery. One lesson that I am grateful for is learning the importance of relationships with our customers. We have amazing guests who have been incredibly supportive of us from the day we opened our doors right through the COVID19 shutdowns. We're so thankful to be part of this community.

**DRENNON:** *Why did you choose Long Beach and, in particular, the neighborhood you are in which seems like it really needed something like Trademark?*

STERLING: Long Beach was on the short list from the start. I grew up spending summers here by the water and sailing. Ilana and I really liked the vibe and community feel, and it felt like Long Beach would support a production brewery. We knew from the start that we wanted Trademark to be in and part of the local community – not hidden away in an industrial park. When we found our location on East Anaheim, we knew it was the perfect fit. Where else can you get 100 feet of storefront on a major street with 32-foot warehouse ceilings with skylights, an outdoor patio and access to the A Line? The neighborhood was hugely supportive from the start, and for that we're incredibly appreciative.

**DRENNON:** *How did you choose the name Trademark?*



Saaz Queen Czech Pilsner

STERLING: Names are so, so important – and incredibly difficult. With the help of a few friends, we put together a huge list of potential names. They were all over the place – some were personal references, some just sounded good, some had SoCal or geographic ties. I remember exactly where I was when Trademark was spawned – sitting in DTLA having a beer with my friend Alex. I was sharing my frustrations with the name issue: “Oh, that's in use, or that's too similar to this, and that's trademarked... wait... Trademark!” It was a total a-ha moment, but it was a great fit.

**DRENNON:** *Do you have a philosophy for Trademark?*

STERLING: It's cliché to talk about quality and standards – everyone says that – and we're no different in that regard: We want to make the best beer possible. That said, what gets us excited is the nexus of technical execution and creativity – combined with environmental stewardship and community leadership. With every beer we start with a baseline objective, then seek opportunity to make it our own. One day it's a traditional German lager made with an atypical hop, and the next it might be an IPA made with a new experimental yeast. We can be as creative or restrained as we like, and we take pride in precision and

progressive, continuous improvement in everything we do.

**DRENNON:** *As small business owners, especially in this insane year of 2020, you probably don't have any time for hobbies. But down the road, what do you guys enjoy doing should any spare time ever materialize?*

STERLING: It's hard to imagine spare time right now, but I can tell you that we really miss seeing our friends face-to-face, cooking and entertaining, dining out, traveling and the outdoors, and adventure. I'd give anything for a road trip to the Eastern Sierras to go camping and fishing, or a weekend to go sailing.

**DRENNON:** *Normally, I would keep asking you brewery-related questions but this is no normal year. I would be remiss to not ask you about our dual crises and your role vis a vis each of them. Let's start with COVID since it came first. What has been the impact to your business?*

STERLING: Enormous would be an understatement. We had a huge amount of momentum and did unusually well through January and February. Even with the early chatter about COVID, March was off to a spectacular start – and so much of that has basically been erased. Because we had not yet experienced a full year of business it's hard to say how far off our numbers are from “normal”. In June we did about 20% of the business of February – but normally June should be several times busier than February – so the numbers are totally distorted.

**DRENNON:** *Do you see a full (financial) recovery and, if so, how long will it take?*

STERLING: In the long term we're confident that Trademark will weather the storm – but achieving our objectives will take longer than projected. In the short term we've had about four months of revenue erased from the books. That loss, coupled with obligations that still need to be addressed (rent, etc.) will be a challenge, but we'll find a way to grow through this.

**DRENNON:** *You partnered with Long Beach distillery Portuguese Bend to make hand sanitizer early on in the crisis. Are you still making it, how much have you made and who foots the bill for your noble contribution?*



Trademark crowler and building mural

STERLING: Working with Simon and the crew at Portuguese Bend was an amazing opportunity. We got to do something beneficial for the community and first responders, while also keeping up with payroll – and even keeping our farmer's dairy cows fed! We produced about 50,000 gallons of 15% wash, which was distilled to about 5,000 gallons of hand sanitizer. All of the product was available to first responders and essential employees (SoCal Gas, Edison, Fire Dept, etc). The pricing was a very slender cost-plus structure – just enough to cover

materials, utilities, staff payroll and a small margin for error. This was not a money-making endeavor - it was a chance to use our resources and pivot to do something for the community in a time of crisis.

**DRENNON:** *What are your views on the see saw of opening, closing, re-opening and closing we are on?*

ILANA: It's exhausting and worrisome. Our first concerns are public health and for our team's well-being. Money and income (for Trademark, any company or individual) is a secondary matter that could/should be resolved with steady policy and leadership.

**DRENNON:** *Let's discuss the civil unrest around George Floyd and too many other black lives lost, Black Lives Matters, and how Trademark is working to support diversity.*

STERLING: Speaking personally, I don't even know where to start on this subject – it's incredibly complex and simple, all at once. In short: I think it's been really enlightening to have candid, un-veiled conversations with so many people from across the spectrum of race, class and socio-economic boundaries. It's also been very important to listen, keep an open mind and be ready to learn and unlearn. People are angry and frustrated – and with good reason. For too long, too many have been quiet about the status quo. I hope that this moment in history is remembered as the time of awakening, recognition and meaningful change in the United

(COVER STORY continued on page 4)



Kegs for distro in the SoCal market

(COVER STORY continued)

States. We're glad to say that in an industry chock full of white guys with beards, our taproom is an outlier. We're incredibly fortunate and proud to have a diverse team and clientele.

**DRENNON:** *Trademark is one of the many breweries showing support by brewing Black is Beautiful. Please share with our readers the genesis of the nationwide collab.*

**ILANA:** The Black is Beautiful initiative was created by Weathered Souls Brewing in San Antonio, Texas. This collaboration is working to bring awareness to the injustices that many BIPOC face daily. 100% of the proceeds are donated to local and national organizations that support equality, diversity, inclusion and empowerment. As a team we selected BLM/LBC and Know Your Rights Camp.

**DRENNON:** *As a former environmental policy analyst for the City of Los Angeles, I am so impressed and appreciative of the commitment and additional investment you have made in water and energy saving equipment in your brewery. It is really state-of-the-art. What motivated you to be so sustainable?*

**STERLING:** I still remember the first time I knocked-out on a commercial system and watched a thousand gallons of hot water go down the drain. The process wasn't any different than home brewing, but the sheer scale was impossible to ignore. From the start we knew we had to do better. Some of our changes are minor and thoughtful (like carefully reusing chemicals to clean tanks more effectively with less chemical, water and energy), and others are much larger and expensive (like investing in a mash-filter brewhouse). Currently we're using about half the water of a brewery our size (based on a ratio of total water used to finished beer), and about a third less energy (gas and electric), and we'll get more efficient as we grow and brew more frequently. In the big picture we knew that sustainability is the only answer, and we're glad to make the front-side investment to be a leader in environmental stewardship.

**DRENNON:** *Are you still doing photography? Is it now a case of being a brewer first and a photographer second or are you able to juggle both passions?*

**STERLING:** Totally retired from photography. I simply don't have the time to juggle two full careers. These days I take pretty pictures of beer, and sometimes the dog. That's about it.

**DRENNON:** *I know you'll want to say something about Millie, the brewery "Lagerdoodle!" Being completely candid, Millie is in the running for cutest damn dog on Earth. Any chance she has a sibling that would like to become our West Coast IPA-doodle?*

**STERLING:** Millie the @LagerDoodle is the crispiest of good gurls! She's become a quick celebrity at the brewery, and BPLA definitely needs a danky-doodle!

**DRENNON:** *In relatively breaking news, you just announced your own line of small batch coffees. What was the impetus to add coffee to your portfolio?*

**STERLING:** Coffee was in the plan from the start. Covid threw things sideways timing-wise so we jumped on the chance to launch the program. I've been a coffee nerd for a long time and it's a perfect fit for our brewery.

**DRENNON:** *Do you have a long-term vision for Trademark and where do you see the brewery in ten years?*



@lagedoodle Millie with Sterling and Ilana

**STERLING:** In 10 years I want to be making awesome beer that Long Beach and SoCal are proud of and that is recognized for environmental stewardship and community leadership. Oh, and I'd like to get a weekend off here or there!

**DRENNON:** *What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?*

**STERLING:** Almost too many to list. Red tape and construction woes are at the top of the list.

**DRENNON:** *What, if anything, would you have changed if you could go back in time?*

**STERLING:** Difficult to say. Overall, not much. We love our location and the space we've created, and most of

our equipment is great and the team is incredible. If I were to nit-pick, there are a hundred small things we'd revise – like more power outlets in the warehouse, or budgeting for a bigger build out.

**DRENNON:** *My favorite question: between talent and work ethic, which is more important?*

**STERLING:** I'd rather be lucky than smart – but since I'm neither I'd vote for work ethic seasoned with preparation.

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

**STERLING:** Never satisfied.

**ILANA:** A positive realist.

## SD BEER NEWS

# ALPINE BEER'S FOUNDERS TO RETURN VIA McILHENNEY BREWING

by Brandon Hernández



Pat McIlhenney left, Shawn right

Originally published in [www.sandiegobeernews.com](http://www.sandiegobeernews.com)

Though currently out of the beer biz, Alpine Beer Co.'s familial brewers, Pat and Shawn McIlhenney, have maintained a strong presence in the San Diego beer community. Much of that has come via collaboration beer projects they've engaged in throughout the county. But if all goes as planned, soon, the father-son team will be hosting collaborative brewing sessions at their own facility, the very same one they owned and operated from 2002 to 2014 in the unincorporated town for

which they named their business.

"We have formed a company called McIlhenney Brewing," says Pat. "We have a lease on our original brewery and tasting room in Alpine. We will be up and running as soon as possible after the current tenant vacates."

The current tenant is Green Flash Brewing, which purchased Alpine Beer Co. from the McIlhenneys in November 2014. It followed roughly a year of Green Flash contract brewing some of Alpine's beers at its Mira Mesa headquarters to help the McIlhenneys better meet demand

for their products. At the time, it was envisioned as something of a teaming of two local entities, with Pat and Shawn remaining on staff to maintain quality and company heritage as a sub-brand of Green Flash.

But in March of 2018, with Green Flash in the midst of massive declines, the company was foreclosed on by Comerica Bank, which had previously issued a loan to owner Mike Hinkley. Comerica then sold its assets (including those of Alpine Beer) to a newly formed investment group called WC IPA LLC. That spelled the end for

Pat's involvement in the company, and this March, the parent company laid off Shawn and other members of the Alpine team.

Per terms of the aforementioned lease, Green Flash has until June 30 to vacate Alpine's original location or incur additional charges. Meanwhile, the McIlhenneys are negotiating on the potential sale of brewing and cellar equipment at that facility.

*Alpine Beer Co. (the future home of McIlhenney Brewing) is located at 2351 & 2363 Alpine Boulevard in Alpine*



The Trademark marquee on Anaheim St