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Vinnie & Natalie Cilurzo

Photo Courtesy of Russian River Brewing Company

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## LA BREWERS

# Common Space + Unity = Community

by Tomm Carroll

Not unlike almost everyone over the past year and a half, the Los Angeles brewing community has been hard hit by the Coronavirus pandemic, as well as the painfully slow return to whatever the new normal will turn out to be. LA Beer Week (LABW) was cancelled for 2020, as was the collaborative Unity beer that accompanies it.

LABW was MIA again this past summer, but a few months ago the Los Angeles Brewers Guild (LABG) offered the glimmer of a return to normalcy: the promise of a 2021 Unity brew! Hawthorne's Common Space was the host brewery and, for the first time ever, the Unity beer is a lager — a hoppy Pilsner to be precise, reflecting the latest preference of progressive brewers, rather than following the fads of the trend toadies. And it's available

now! Plus, a one-day LA Brewers Guild mini-festival to celebrate the beer's release was held at Common Space on Saturday, October 30, the first "gathering" since Covid changed all of our lives.

The Unity brew day in early August was a festive occasion for those who were able to attend — masked, of course — packing Common Space's massive brewery. It marked the first time many in the LA beer community had seen friends and colleagues since winter of 2020.

"The LA craft brewing industry may have grown significantly in the last decade, but many of our businesses are still relatively small," Frances Cannon (née Lopez), Executive Director of the Los Angeles Brewers Guild, said in a statement. "This means that

most brewery members are wearing many hats and have little time to actually leave their breweries. Add in the challenges of being understaffed during a pandemic, and you really see how isolated our industry has been these last two years."

Cannon added, "This year's Unity brew was our first in-person Guild meeting since November 2019 and it was beautiful to see our community come together for the first time to engage, learn and interact with one another. It was a much-needed respite during this constantly moving time."

To learn more about the decision to make this year's Unity a hoppy Pilsner, Beer Paper chatted with Common Space's Director of Operations Kushal Hall, along with Head Brewer Andy Link, as well as CEO Brent Knapp

sitting in, on a warm, early September afternoon over a round of lagers (of course) in the brewery's outdoor beer garden.

### Creating Unity

Living up to its name, Common Space wanted the Los Angeles Brewers Guild to have a voice in choosing the style of this year's Unity. "We put out a question to guild members, asking, 'Hey, do you guys want to do an IPA? Or a hoppy Pilsner?' I think the result was like 37 to three or something, predominantly for the hoppy Pilsner idea. There were a few voices in the guild who said, 'You gotta do an IPA; if you don't, it won't sell,' revealed Hall, adding with a smile, 'So we'll see soon if they were right.'"

(LA BREWERS continued on page 4)



Unity Brew Day 2021

Photo Credit: Nick Gingold



# BOTTLES AND CANS; CLAP YOUR HANDS

Hoppy IPAs, crisp lagers, and perfectly blended Belgian-style sour ales, Beachwood has a beer for whatever you're feeling.

Beachwood

(LA BREWERS continued)

In theory, at least in recent years, Unity has been considered a collaboration brew among LABG members. “But you can’t really have 90 breweries suggesting an idea for a recipe,” said Hall. “I’ve observed over the last couple of years that the host brewery pretty much does the recipe and maybe reaches out to get advice from a few people. But the brew day is more of an event and a celebration of our unity as a local industry, a day to chat about things and get ideas from each other. Although there were a couple people who jumped in with some hop suggestions and stuff. We took all that into consideration.”

Despite favoring a hoppy Pilsner as their Unity brew, Hall and Link did not have a pre-conceived recipe for that popular sub-style in mind.

“We had been playing around with different versions of like an IPL or an American Pilsner — whatever you want to call it — for a while, but never really hit on anything that was like a beer we want to develop into a brand,” explained Hall. “But it’s definitely a style we like. I think Andy and I were both probably a little inspired by a love



LABG’s Frances Cannon addresses brewery members at 2021 Unity brew day

Photo Credit: Nick Gingold

of [Highland Park Brewing’s] Timbo Pils — a really good local example of that kind of hoppy, American Pilsner kind of style. We wanted something that wasn’t a beer we were making year ‘round.”

Indeed, Common Space had been hopping up lagers, and specifically Pilsner styles for some time, most notably earlier this year with its wonderful one-off, We Belong Together.

“That was like a stepping stone to our Unity recipe,” explained Link. “It was a Pilsner hopped with Zappa, a Neomexicanus hop, and [New Zealand’s] Nelson Sauvín.” The beer’s moniker refers to how well those hops work, aroma- and flavor-wise, in combination. “But we didn’t really

have any idea at first which hops were gonna go into the Unity. Although one of our sponsors, Yakima Valley Hops, had a great selection to choose from.”

Common Space lined up sponsors to help raise money for the guild, with many of the sponsorships coming in the form of donated materials. Yakima Valley worked with the brewers, and they were able to line up the hop choices pretty quickly. “We used Talus and Cashmere hops in the kettle, and then dry-hopped with Lupomax-

(LA BREWERS continued on page 6)

# BEER PAPER

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Common Space Brewer Josie Becker weighing Talus hops

Photo Credit: Nick Gingold



2021 Unity brew day

Photo Credit: Nick Gingold



Julia Ham and Claire Schoch pouring fresh pints at Unity Brew Day

Photo Credit: Nick Gingold



Andy Link describing the complexities of the incredible BLT he had the previous day

Photo Credit: Nick Gingold

# Award-winning beer from LA County



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(LA BREWERS continued)

Cashmere,” Link offered.

Talus, a new-ish hop (formerly experimental hop HBC 692), was first used to great effect in the brewery’s Talus Beach, a single-hop hazy Pale Ale, released this past summer. “That was our first time brewing with the hop,” added Hall. “I get a lot of guava in the nose, but it’s more tangerine-y citrus in the mouth. That seemed like a really good choice, because it wasn’t too dank, piney or intense, which might make the lager too astringent. We used that on the hot side, along with some Cashmere.

“And then we dry-hopped with a small amount of Lupomax Cashmere,” he continued. “Like Cryo, Lupomax is a different brand name for a similar product. They’re fractionated hops that basically just amp up flavor and lower green matter. And we found that, especially in dry-hopping colder beers like this lager, you can extract a lot of that green flavor. So by using the Lupomax, we’ll have a cleaner expression of the fruity or more floral parts of the Cashmere, which is what we wanted.”

According to Hall and Link, this is Yakima Valley’s first time sponsoring a Unity brew and the hop supplier was pretty stoked about the opportunity. “They’re excited that we were using both Talus and the Lupomax, which are some products they wanted to focus on,” said Hall.

The malt bill consists of Weyermann Pilsner malts (which Common Space uses in virtually all of its lagers), and the beer was fermented with Unity sponsor White Labs’ 830 German Lager Yeast (ditto) for about two weeks in primary in the low 50° range before lagering at 42° and crashing to 30°.

The hoppy Pilsner, which finished at 6.1% abv, was brewed in two 40bbl batches, two weeks apart, which were blended together before packaging — about half in cans — during the first week of October, and made available immediately thereafter.

And speaking of the 16oz cans, the label’s illustration was done by Priscilla Witte, whose murals appear in Common Space’s taproom. “This was an image we wanted — a big group of various people that sort of represent the craft beer scene in LA,



Common Space’s Kushal Hall (left) with Pacific Plate Brewing’s Javi Gonzalez  
Photo Credit: Nick Gingold

not really depicting any particular individuals but just this sense of the diversity that we see and feel in our customers, collaborators and other local breweries,” Hall elaborated. “It’s just kind of a big, fun jumble of people that kind of feels the way it did when we were taking the big group photo here on the Unity brew day in early August.

“That’s what Unity is all about, he added, in conclusion. “The name is the brand, you know, so we just wanted to

give it our Common Space illustrated feel that our labels have.”

Common Space’s Unity is available now at the brewery (on draught and in cans) and as a guest tap at a few local breweries, as well in cans at discriminating beer shops.

*Tomm Carroll is a Los Angeles-based beer writer / judge / educator / historian / collector / traveler / drinker (not always in that order). He can be reached at [beerscribe@earthlink.net](mailto:beerscribe@earthlink.net).*



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## UNITY HISTORY

# History of LA Craft Brewers' Unity

by Frances Cannon, Executive Director, LABG

The Unity beer for Los Angeles was first established in 2011 by the two-year-old Eagle Rock Brewery as a unique collaboration brew to celebrate that year's third annual LA Beer Week. The early iterations\* of the brew were hosted by Eagle Rock, with the help of neighboring breweries and beer industry professionals.

After ERB's co-owner and brewmaster Jeremy Raub founded the Los Angeles County Brewers Guild in 2013, Eagle Rock soon passed the torch of coordinating Unity to the guild. Since then, a different LABG brewery has been called upon to host the annual brew day, which serves as the guild's largest internal community-building event.

Following are the Unity brews over the years:



2017 Unity IPA  
Courtesy of El Segundo Brewing Co

2011 – Eagle Rock Brewery with Craftsman Brewing and LA beer industry colleagues

### Tamarind Saison

2012 – Eagle Rock Brewery with LA beer industry colleagues

### Berliner Weisse-style sour ale with Prickly Pear

2013 – Eagle Rock Brewery with Maltose Falcons Homebrewer Craig Wickham (winner of the Doug King Memorial Homebrew Competition; prize was to have recipe brewed commercially for the GABF ProAm Competition)

### Red Mild with Hibiscus and Honey

2014 – Eagle Rock Brewery with LA Brewers Guild

### All California Citrus Pale Ale with CA-grown malt, hops and local citrus.

2015 – Smog City Brewing with LA Brewers Guild

### Tart Saison

2016 – Three Weavers Brewing with LA Brewers Guild

### Experimental IPA

2017 – El Segundo Brewing with LA Brewers Guild

### India Pale Ale

2018 – Los Angeles Ale Works with LA Brewers Guild

Duo – West Coast IPA and Hazy IPA (first canned versions of Unity)

2019 – Claremont Craft Ales with LA Brewers Guild

### Double IPA

2020 – No Unity brew, or LA Beer Week

2021 – Common Space Brewery with LA Brewers Guild

**Hoppy Pilsner** (No LA Beer Week, but a one-day LA Brewers Unity Oktoberfest outside Common Space Brewery on October 30)

### Notes:

- Unity has been canned since 2018 but there are no firm rules that Unity hosts must use cans as their packaging.
- The annual Unity brew has grown every year, now bringing over 100 of its brewery representatives together for a day of community.

- LABG member breweries bid for the Unity brew every year. They present their intention to host and members vote for a winner. Those who don't score the bid one year are always encouraged to try again another year.

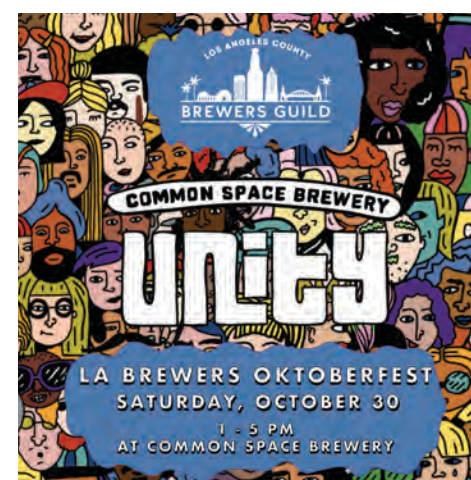
\* **Author's note:** In 2010, for the second annual LA Beer Week, Eagle Rock Brewery and local beer industry colleagues brewed a special beer, which was served at Beer Week's signature closing festival. It was a **California Common** (an ale/lager hybrid), cleverly titled LA'S TEAM BEER — so it sounded like “LA Steam Beer” when you said it. Eagle Rock was not brewing commercially in 2009 for the inaugural LA Beer Week, so there was no commemorative beer.



2018 Unity Juicy IPA label  
Courtesy of Los Angeles Ale Works



2018 Unity West Coast IPA label  
Courtesy of Los Angeles Ale Works



2021 Unity hoppy Pilsner  
Courtesy of Common Space Brewery

## OC BEAT

## Festivals + New Breweries + Awards

by David Mulvihill

Festivals

On September 11, 2010, the first OC Brew Ha Ha was held to benefit the Fallen Firefighters Foundation in Irvine's Hidden Valley Park. While the park and remnants of what used to be Lion Country Safari have been gone for many years, Brew Ha Ha, in its Oak Canyon Park home (near Irvine Lake) has continued the annual celebration (except for its 2020 absence). Spinoff fests have also launched in the years since. OC Brew Ha Ha returned on September 11th to celebrate its 11th gathering. Brew Ska Ska was the theme this year, with an entertaining lineup of Ska and Ska-Punk bands performing at the festival, and Less Than Jake headlining.

Next up was the OC Boo Ha Ha, at the OC Fairgrounds. With Haunted Oktoberfest theme, liquid refreshment focused on Oktoberfest and German-style lagers.

The OC Brew Ho Ho Holiday Ale Festival returns next month. Check Brew Ha Ha Productions social media for info & tickets.

The first of the Post-COVID-19 beer festivals returned to Orange County on June 26 with the premier of Brew Ha Ha's Summer Roots Craft Beer and

Music Festival. This reporter was able to attend the first part of the fest, intent on making the rounds to catch up with brewers and owners, meet some of the new folks that have surfaced in the midst of the pandemic, and to taste their latest offerings.

New OC Breweries

**1886 Brewing Company** is the newest beer destination in the City of Orange, brought to us by Michael Hernandez and Andrew Ciora. In addition to stellar house-brewed beers, 1886 has a full bar and food menu. It is located on N. Glassell in Old Town Orange, just north of The Circle and two doors south of Smoqued, the team's California BBQ establishment open since 2012. Head Brewer Shaun Morgan was in attendance with the 1886 team, pouring four of his tasty creations: Live Stream cream ale, Pitcher Park American pale, Buzz Hops, a West Coast pale with Nelson, Vic Secret and Mosaic hops, and a double IPA with Strata, Nelson, Simcoe, and Citra hops.

Shaun and 1886 recently received a Great American Beer Festival 2021 bronze medal for Elleigh's ESB, awarded in the Extra Special Bitter category. Last check of the 1886 tap list revealed that this homage to the



Tustin Brewing Co owner Jason Jeralds, 1886 Brewing's head brewer Shaun Morgan and TBC head brewer Daniel Quinones.

Photo Credit: David Mulvihill

British style may still be available to enjoy fresh at the source.

Shaun joined 1886 after an eventful couple of years as head brewer at Kern River Brewing Company. GABF 2019 brought him and his brewing team two gold and two silver medals, along with the coveted Brewery Group and Brewery Group Brewer of the Year award. He and the Kern River Brewing crew returned to GABF 2020 for an additional gold and two silver medals.

Before Kern, Shaun's career as a brewing professional began at

AleSmith in San Diego, followed by a stint with Pizza Port Brewing Co.'s production facility in Bressi Ranch.

The team from Dana Point's **Station Craft Brewery + Kitchen** was onsite and excited to be pouring a refreshingly crisp Mexican lager and satiating & hoppy Diller Kana West Coast IPA (with tropical notes of pineapple, melon and hint of coconut). I spent some time catching up with head brewer Steven Hicks, brewer Brian Rederer and co-founder Keagan Banks.



Station Craft's Keagan Banks, Brian Rederer and Steven Hicks.

Photo Credit: David Mulvihill



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Congrats to the team and their recent recognition at the California Craft Brewer Cup competition. They were awarded 2nd Place in the International Lager category for Station Craft's West Philly, a Pottsville-style Amber Lager inspired by Yuengling Brewery's Traditional Lager.

For those interested in the lineage of Station Craft's brewers, Steven was brewing at Karl Strauss Brewing Co.'s Anaheim brewpub (also for its DTLA location) during the years prior to his move to Brewery X in late 2018.

Brian joins Station Craft most-recently from Brewery X as well. He formerly brewed with Artifex Brewing in San Clemente. Prior to that, he was at Stone Brewing Co for a couple of years.

With his return to the duties of head brewer, Steven is enjoying a revival of his brewing creativity. Diller Kana was the first IPA Steven and Brian brewed after arriving at Station Craft.

In support of the USA Surfing Team during the recent Summer Olympics, Station Craft launched a collaborative West Coast IPA, Speed, Power & Flow and featured the team on the cans, with a label reminiscent of a box of Wheaties.

Also for those keeping track, former Pizza Port brewer Kane Christensen had initially been recruited as head brewer in the early days of Station Craft's build-out and eventual opening. Kane has since left to join the TAPS

Brewery and Barrel Room in Tustin. With the TAPS-Mason Ale Works (Tableside Partners) merger/ strategic partnership, Kane and team likely have their hands and kettles full. Look for more on the above in a future edition of Beer Paper.

There is also talk that Station Craft may be looking to expand production by way of a second production facility and tasting room in San Clemente.

San Clemente's **Delahunt Brewing Co** also made the scene. While presently marketing to outside accounts, Todd Delahunt's San Clemente taproom (on Calle Amanecer) is still in-process.

Head brewer Kyle Boruff and brewer Justin Venegas were dispensing two Delahunt creations. 1924 Blonde, crisp with malt and fruit notes proved quenching given the impending heat of the day. This beer received a 2nd Place Award at the recent CA Craft Brewers Cup in the Blonde and Golden Ale category. Cheers to Kyle, Justin, and Team Delahunt. Delahunt's second beer, Bulldog IPA (a 6% ABV West Coast IPA), possessed satisfying notes of Simcoe and Mosaic hops.

Kyle's prior brewing gigs included Black Market Brewing (Brewmaster) in Temecula, and Stone Brewing in San Diego County.

Nathan Beckham (co-founder) and Josiah Spriggs (tasting room supervisor) were dispensing at **The Dog Pawrk Brewing Co.** Their San Juan Capistrano tasting room



The Dog Pawrk's Josiah Spriggs and Nathan Beckham.  
Photo Credit: David Mulvihill



Delahunt brewing team: Justin Venegas and Kyle Boruff.  
Photo Credit: David Mulvihill

opened in mid-2020, in the midst of the pandemic. The initial decision was to concentrate first on the tasting room, and take advantage of available capacity at BackStreet Brewery, Anaheim, forming a "gypsy-brewing" relationship to craft The Dog Pawrk's variety of traditional ales, IPAs, lagers, seltzers, "Crushable Refreshment" and variants of the above. Community and pet-focused regularly scheduled events include dog and emotional support animal fund raisers, pet rescue & adoption, canine-focused events, and more.

Awards

OC brewers received a total of nine awards at September's judging of the 2021 Great American Beer Festival Competition in Denver.

Gold Medals

Out of 133 entries, newcomer Radiant Beer Co (Anaheim) took home gold in the Juicy/Hazy category for Second That Emotion. Andrew Bell and the Radiant Beer Co Team also received the 0-250 Barrels Brewery and Brewer of the Year Award.

Stanton's Bearded Tang Brewing Team (Jonathan Chiusano and Jerrod Larsen) received their gold medal for their Vlad the Barista Imperial Coffee Stout, a brew that included a special roast of Zambian coffee from Portola Coffee Roasters in Costa Mesa.

Rick Smets and his brewing team at Stereo Brewing Co. (Placentia) returned to the GABF stage, this time

to accept a gold medal for the coveted Robot Imperial Red. Robot received GABF silver in 2018.

Mischief, the longtime Belgian-inspired staple of The Bruery's (Placentia) lineup garnered 2021 gold. It also earned GABF gold in 2016 and bronze in 2018.

Silver Medals

Ian McCall and the Riip Beer Co (Huntington Beach) team received their third GABF silver medal for Black the Riipper, Riips hop-forward black IPA with Mosaic, Simcoe and El Dorado hops. Silver medals for this beer were also received in 2020 and 2018.

Unsung Brewing Co's (Anaheim) Let it Out, a "New Zealand IPA" with NZ hops Strata and Enigma, earned the team a silver medal.

Bronze Medals

As detailed above, 1886 Brewing received bronze for Elleigh's ESB.

Karl Strauss Brewing Co. – Anaheim received a bronze medal for its Golden Stout, a blonde coffee beer made with oats, vanilla beans, cocoa nibs and coffee.

David Mulvihill continues his thirst to experience and promote the best of craft beer. He also provides business-side support (reporting, excise tax, policies & personnel) to local breweries and brewers guilds.  
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## COVER STORY

## Vinnie

by Tomme Arthur

Vinnie Cilurzo. Often described in glowing terms like “brilliant brewer, the nicest guy in the business and a damn fine washoe player,” I’m lucky enough to call him a great friend and someone who has been with me on my own brewing journey which now eclipses 25 years. He’s part of the single name club and truly the one and only Vinnie you need to know if you want to KNOW what great beer tastes like.

When asked to interview Vinnie for Beer Paper, I thought, what is it about my longtime friend that you don’t know? As one of the most famous and recognizable brewers in the world, it’s clear that one day he’ll have his own star on the brewing walk of fame. There’s nothing he hasn’t accomplished and doubtful there is anything more he could do to prove his largeness. It also feels that nearly everything has been written about him already!

But as someone who has been lucky enough to share copious pints of Blind Pig, travel half way around the world with him and work collaboratively on some incredible beers, I must confess, I probably have pinched myself more than a few times wondering how the hell did these opportunities come to fruition? It’s kind of like an out of body experience, “That’s Vinnie Frigging Cilurzo sitting there and, you know, we’re just chewing the fat on what makes Simcoe hops so great.”

So how did two guys from Southern California gravitate towards a shared path of awesome beer? In short, I think it’s a strong sense of being cut from a similar cloth. Vinnie grew up in Temecula, CA, about 60 miles north of San Diego where I grew up. Neither of these cities was a shining beacon for craft beer in the early 1990s. We entered into the business a couple of years apart with both of us being very young and enthusiastic brewers eager to find our paths.

More often than not, these paths shared parallel trajectories. Often, we would catch up at beer festivals including the Great American Beer Festival

where our booths were typically in the same aisle. Many of our earliest conversations centered on sour beer production methods and things each of us were doing. As he was carving out his brewing niche in Northern California, I was doing much the same in Southern California. So, in many ways we were sounding boards for each other at a time when little documentation was available to brewers who wished to attempt this style of brewing.

In 2003, the Great American Beer Festival awarded the very first Double IPA medals. In a stroke of fate from the brewing Gods, Vinnie and I shared the stage that day as two of the first to medal in what now has become one of the most hotly contested categories. It was a moment I will never forget.

While during the earliest parts of our careers, we focused on how to be better brewers, nowadays, it feels like more of our conversations center around how to be great business owners in the great state of California. Casual conversations over Gin and Tonics have become a bit more plentiful of late. His love for The Botanist means it’s always easy to get him to stay for just one more.

Over the years, we’ve shared our passion for making the best beers possible. Sure, we’ve aged a bit and there’s more salt than pepper in the little hair we still have. But 25 years later, I’m proud to say he’s always made me a better brewer and for that I am thankful to have made his acquaintance and that I am certain we will continue to find time to sit down and discuss the world of beer in meaningful ways.

Without further ado, I present my friend Vinnie.

**TOMME: You broke into the business in 1993? At the time there was very little craft beer and location wise it was another challenge. Blind Pig has been well documented so let’s talk about the way it felt to be so young, newly married and running a business.**

**VINNNIE:** It was actually 1994 when we opened Blind Pig Brewery in Temecula, at the time there were only three micro-breweries in San Diego County and a handful north of Temecula. Despite the 80+ hour weeks, those were exciting times, I was young and full of energy so the long days were not an issue. I think more than anything I was making the beers I wanted to drink and we had to figure out how to sell a hoppy Golden Ale and an IPA.

**TOMME: Leaving Blind Pig you moved to Korbelt and were given the chance to build Russian River from the ground up. As someone who got the same opportunity with The Lost Abbey, I know what that is like. Is**

**there a moment from Korbelt when you felt like perhaps you transitioned and you knew you could really make a full career out of this?**

**VINNNIE:** It was late 1996 when I left Blind Pig and spring of 1997 when Korbelt hired me to run their new brewery, Russian River Brewing Company. Initially one of the winemakers was overseeing the brewery operation and we made a Golden Wheat Ale, Pale Ale, Amber Ale, and Porter. Less than a year later Korbelt gave me full reign of the operation and I switched up the line-up of beers including dropping the Amber Ale and switching it to an IPA, which at the time there were still very few IPAs available. It was about



Vinnie Cilurzo

All Photos Courtesy of Russian River Brewing Company



Vinnie & Natalie Cilurzo

that time that I knew that RRBC would be a success and that Korbel had the confidence in me to run their small brewery.

**TOMME:** *There was a point when Korbel offered you the opportunity to take full stewardship of the Russian River Brewing brand. Given that Natalie (your wife) had a successful career in the wine world, it clearly was a monumental jump to dive head first into owning a brewery together. From the outside looking in, you both seemed to make it look effortless. Care to share the secret sauce (other than sharing great Pinot Noirs)?*

**VINNIE:** It was April 1, 2002 when my boss at Korbel called me to his office to tell me they had officially decided to close the brewery. Yes, it was April Fool's Day so I did have to ask, "you're joking, right?" In truth this was a discussion that had been going on for a few months which I was involved with. In the end they decided to close the brewery but I was able to trade my severance package for the RRBC name as well as our other beer brand names such as Damnation and Pliny the Elder. A year later in 2003, I officially left Korbel. During that year, Natalie and I wrote a business plan and found 30 investors to fund RRBC version 2.0. When we opened the brewpub in Santa Rosa in April 2004, Natalie officially joined the brewery and left the wine industry. I think the key to us being both married and business partners is the fact that our jobs within RRBC and our skill sets are totally different. There are certainly duties within our business

that we have cross over in, but in general, we do completely different jobs. One thing for sure is we try to get away from is the day to day of the brewery so we can think big picture for our business. These are often business trips, but it still gives us a chance to remove ourselves from the day to day. This reminds me of the old saying, "it is the difference between working at your business or on your business."

**TOMME:** *Do you even remember what it was like before Double IPA was a thing? Given that Pliny the Elder continues to be an amazing example, you should probably talk about the path to bring Pliny to people and at the same time all of the process improvements you'd made. I doubt many people even know how hard your team has worked on this beer and Blind Pig in particular.*

**VINNIE:** We have been making PTE since 1999, so it was first brewed when we were at Korbel. But it was in 2004 when we opened in Santa Rosa that it became a full-time beer. And it wasn't until 2008 that it started gaining popularity and by 2010 and beyond its popularity kept growing. Initially we couldn't even give it away, this was even the case up until 2008. There was a lot of hand selling the beer by way of beer festivals or literally taking a growler or bottle into an account and tasting them on the beer. I would never just leave the sample, I always wanted to taste the PTE sample with the beer buyer. So, there were difficulties on multiple fronts, because it wasn't just selling

(COVER STORY continued on page 12)

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(COVER STORY continued)

a highly hopped beer at a time when the average consumer wasn't drinking IPA, finding the best ingredients was not as easy as it is today. Keep in mind, there was no Citra, Mosaic, or El Dorado, to name a few of the popular designer hops. Pliny was built around Simcoe and Simcoe was the first private hop variety to really blow up. It didn't happen overnight, but I loved the citrus, pine, and pungent notes that Simcoe carried. So back in the day the recipe adjustment I was making were mostly ingredient driven. And although we still make small tweaks to the ingredient bill now and then, these days the larger changes are process changes to create more aroma and flavor impact as well as better shelf stability.

**TOMME:** *When you opened on Fourth Street in Santa Rosa, you really established yourselves as Northern California locals and have since really become a massive part of the beer scene. Let's talk about that and what it has meant to bring Pliny the Younger to so many people?*

**VINNIE:** It is funny to think back to 2004 when we opened the Santa Rosa RRBC brewpub. The very first day we opened it was very busy but, over time, business settled in and we had some pretty dark days when nobody was coming in. I remember one random mid-week day in 2004 or 2005 when nobody came in until 5 pm or so for happy hour. Folks always think of the Santa Rosa brewery being busy, but it has not always been that way.

We were an IPA focused brewery and IPAs were not popular yet to the general drinking population. But we stuck with our focus on hoppy (and Belgian and sour barrel aged) beers and in time folks got acclimated to the big hoppy aroma and flavor of our beers. Having a brewpub was very helpful here because our staff could educate the consumer on what they were tasting. Pliny the Younger (PTY) was first made in 2005, but it wasn't until 2010 that it blew up. Natalie and I never expected PTY to become a cult beer like it has, in fact, we tell our staff every year before the PTY release to remember that this might be the year when folks don't show up. Natalie and I have a firm belief to run our business with a little paranoia with the idea being that we can always make better beer, food, and give an even better customer experience. This sounds a little contrived but we truly believe it and each year we try to make the PTY experience even better than the last. Walking out and talking to guests in line for PTY is still one of the most humbling things I do each year and Natalie and I try to walk the line at both breweries every day during the release.

**TOMME:** *The Toronado in San Francisco and owner Dave and Jennifer Keene have been huge supporters of you and Natalie. We all have great T-Room stories. Have any to share that you love? (Anniversary blends, Washoes, The Tamale Lady, Paxton Brunches?)*

**VINNIE:** Yes, Toronado (San Francisco) has been a huge part of



Pliny the Elder

All Photos Courtesy of Russian River Brewing Company

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our success in San Francisco. In San Diego, before Toronado (San Diego) closed this year, Toronado was also a big part of our distribution in SoCal. I remember the first time I took some beer samples for Dave to taste, it was Damnation and HopTime Harvest Ale. Dave keyed in on the HopTime, our wet hop beer which at the time was made using 100% of our own estate hops that we grew on the property of Korbel. Dave loved the HopTime,

and while he and I finished the bottle I had brought down, the only thing he asked was, “how many kegs can I purchase?” He never asked how much the kegs cost and that always resonated with me. Dave never cared what the cost was, he only wanted to know how many he could sell. I’ve been to Belgium twice with Dave, one was around Toronado’s 20th anniversary and the second was just before their 25th anniversary. Traveling through

Belgium and visiting breweries like Orval and Duvel with Dave are still some of my favorite memories though there are many which include beer blends we have made together as well as many late nights playing Washoes.

**TOMME:** *We have played a game or two of Washoes!*

VINNIE: Well, we have you to thank for the introduction of Washoes to the beer industry. My first memory was playing Washoe’s at the Anderson Valley Beer Festival with you, Dave, and many others. We still have boards at our brewery and though we don’t play as much as we use to, it is always a fun and memorable.

**TOMME:** *It’s been over 25 years of being in this business and beer has changed significantly. One thing that has not changed is your fervent desire to improve your beers. As an industry Grey Beard, why is this process of improving so important to you?*

*Clearly, it’s a ton of work.*

VINNIE: I love learning. I think this fact as well as what I mentioned earlier about running our business with a little paranoia keeps driving me to make better beer. Another thing that keeps me striving for even higher quality beer is the fact that there is so much competition now, especially in the IPA category. With all this competition, I have to keep improving PTE, Blind Pig, and the rest of our beers. When we built our new(ish) Windsor, CA production brewery, it was an opportunity to add some components to our operations that improve the quality of our beer. We could have easily kept doing what we were doing at our old production facility but Natalie and I really wanted a brewery we could be proud of and develop a unique customer experience which I think we have done with tours that are a very sensory driven experience.

(COVER STORY continued on page 14)



Pliny the Younger being poured



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(COVER STORY continued)

**TOMME:** *The Brewers Association has bestowed two very important awards on you. The 2008 Russell Schehrer Award as well as the 2017 Brewers Association Recognition Award (shared with Natalie). What do these mean to you and talk about the process of giving back to your brewing community and how that feels for you and Russian River.*

**VINNIE:** Both awards were very humbling to receive because they are voted on by our peers, especially for the RS Award which is voted on by the past winners. As a young brewer there were far less brewery peers to lean on for advice but there were certainly plenty who helped Natalie and I out. To me it is my obligation to now give back and this

is something Natalie and I have done as much as possible.

**TOMME:** *You were an early adopter of barrel aging for sour beer production. Knowing that you love these beers and continue to make them, what have been your experiences with these beers and the uber consumer of late?*

**VINNIE:** This is still one of my favorite parts of our brewery, especially now with all the extra space at the Windsor facility. I mentioned earlier about getting help from peers in the beer industry. Hands down you were my main brewer peer who I communicated with regarding making these types of beers. There were no books, web sites, or podcast on the topic and all you and I had was each other



Santa Rosa Brewpub RRBC growlers



Pliny the Younger line in February 2020 (pre-pandemic)



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to rely on to bounce ideas off of. I still remember those days like it was yesterday because it was so exciting and, to some degree, you and I were writing the script on how others would produce these beers should they decide to make funky beer. Present day things have really changed and I'm sure you agree, with the popularity of quick sour beers, there are less people drinking old school, barrel aged sour beer. There are also a lot more breweries making these beers which sometimes take years to make. I don't think the pie has gotten much larger for the consumers that are into these beers and, with more breweries making these beers, we are all competing for the same consumers still into these beers. But the same thing as with our IPAs, I don't rest on our laurels with our funky beers and I feel like we can continue to improve the quality. One example is at the Windsor facility the barrel room can hold the temperature firmly at 58F which to me is very important when making these beers.

**TOMME:** *Russian River beers have famously come in 500 ml single serve bottles. This wasn't always the case and now you're getting into canning runs. What do you see your packaging looking like in the future*

*(cork finish, 500 ml, four-pack, etc.)?*

**VINNIE:** We did six-packs at Blind Pig and at RRBC-Korbel, and one should always learn from their past experiences and mistakes. Natalie and I knew when we re-opened RRBC in Santa Rosa that we would never do six-packs again. I was looking for a single serving size bottle and remembered the two German beer bottles that I saw in Germany many years before. After seeing the two main German bottles I fell in love with, it is the one that we still use today. We now fill them to 17.25 oz, but one of the things I like is that it is basically a pint, so it is around the same size that most Americans purchase a beer in a bar or restaurant. Although we are doing some canning now, we are still firmly a bottle (and keg) brewery with cans being a very small percentage of what we do. The split is probably 95% bottles and 5% cans. For our barrel beers we still use a cork finished bottle. It was many years ago that we switched from a 750ml to a 375ml bottle with the idea being similar to the bottle use for our hoppy beers. I wanted it to be single serving. 750ml of sour/barrel aged beer is too much for one person.

(COVER STORY continued on page 16)



Vinnie Cilurzo

(COVER STORY continued)

Although the industry continues to grow via cans, I'm still firmly a believer in bottles. Though cans have their advantages such as being lighter weight, don't let light in, and if sealed properly do hold up better if your beer doesn't sell quickly. But our beer sells quickly and with great packaging equipment a bottle will always have a lower Total Package Oxygen (TPO) compared to a can at packaging, and TPO is a cornerstone of our quality program and for this I like bottles better.

**TOMME:** *What's your favorite font? (There seem to be all kinds of jokes about Russian River fonts online)*

VINNIE: Ha, that is funny!

**TOMME:** *Will there ever be an Isabelle Proximus reunion tour?*

VINNIE: Interesting question. I like where Isabelle Proximus sits in the craft beer history book. For those that remember it, the beer holds fond memories and the beer had an exceptional flavor profile. Though I wouldn't close the door on a reunion brew, there is a side of me that likes to leave it in the past and keep it as a great memory!

**TOMME:** *You built a "brewer's brewery." People come from all over the world to see it. Explain what that was like and what else you want to accomplish with that space.*

VINNIE: I remember while we were in the design phase, we were nearly debt free. Pliny sales were great, we were at capacity at both our breweries at the time, and in general things were going well. Ken Grossman was a huge help in designing the brewery but I do remember him asking me, "why do you want to build a new brewery and take on all that debt?" I had a simple answer, "because Natalie and I want a brewery we can be proud of!" Ken knew exactly what I meant as he had recently built his dream brewery in North Carolina. Building our dream brewery was an amazing, nerve-racking experience but oh so rewarding. Installing open top fermenters, a German brewhouse, and a Koelsch to name a few things was pretty damn cool. Being able to incorporate all the things I have dreamed of into a brewing facility was a once in a lifetime experience and probably something I wouldn't want to do again as it probably took a couple years off my life. But I wouldn't trade it for anything.

**TOMME:** *What makes for a bad day at the office?*

VINNIE: I make beer for a living so, in truth, how bad can a day be? Of course, I have a bad day from time to time, but I have to remind myself that it is just beer and, though it brings joy to people which I appreciate, I also don't take it that serious because after all, and like I said before, it is just beer. I've said that in the past and some people have gotten mad at me for saying, "it's just beer" but there are people in far worse situations even on my worst day in the brewery, so I try to remind myself of this on the occasional bad day.

**TOMME:** *Given the epic list of things you have accomplished is there something not on the list? What point will you be satisfied with your breadth of work?*

VINNIE: I don't know that I will ever be 100% satisfied as there is always work that can be done to make our beer even better. But there is success in our business beyond our beers, for example, our staff. One of the reasons we grew was to be able to take care of our team and let them grow with the

company but we had to get bigger to do this. Getting larger also afforded us the opportunity to give our team more benefits which is something we've been able to do. To go back to your question, in general I think it goes back to the idea that Natalie and I run the business with a little paranoia which keeps driving us both to do everything better, even if we do it pretty good already.

**TOMME:** *How old do you think you'll be when you decide to retire from this business?*

VINNIE: That is a good question. On occasion, Natalie and I joke that we have a brewery for sale, but of course we are just joking. I think the answer to that question falls with Natalie and my comfort level with our team as we continue to move forward. Being able to peel off some of our day-to-day tasks is something that I am working on so I can work on special projects and brew in our 5 bbl RnD brewery more. But at the same time, I will always be involved to some degree in the day to day as will Natalie because we are firm believers that a company

needs leaders that can make decisions often quickly with some of them being difficult. These decisions often fall on our shoulders just as they do at Lost Abbey for you. I will say this, I love what I do and I'm not quite ready to retire.

*Tomme Arthur is the Co-Founder and Chief Operating Owner for Port Brewing and The Lost Abbey. Located in San Marcos, Tomme and his partners founded this brewery in 2006 before brewing was hip, cool and fun. A veteran of the craft brewing industry since 1996, Tomme has spent the better part of 25 years making the most unique beers he and his team can imagine. With one of the largest barrel collections in Southern California, you never know what they will dream up next. He remembers meeting Vinnie for the first time at the 1996 Great American Beer Festival. He lives in San Marcos, CA with his wife and two daughters. When not working, he enjoys long naps under oak trees, midnight walks on the beach and riding his bike while pedaling for beers.*



Tomme Arthur, Co-Founder & Chief Operating Owner  
Port Brewing and The Lost Abbey  
Photo Credit: David Johnson



## BOOK REVIEW

# Beer Bookshelf - Modern British Beer

by Sean Inman

Travel may seem a radical notion to those who have been stuck at one address for what seems an excruciatingly long time...with our wanderlust being only slightly sated by beer deliveries from local and far away breweries. But you can also put your nose into a book instead of the hop aroma of an IPA to experience another country's beer.

Let's take an international flight to Heathrow with *Modern British Beer* by Matthew Curtis published by CAMRA Books. Curtis has chosen a different tack than other beer books. Yes, it is organized by region and yes it has glamor shots of brewing equipment and tap rooms but this survey of British (and some from Northern Ireland) beer wants to spark joy and conversation.

Literally, the first section of the book is about the joy of beer. I was so grateful to read about the love of beer or as Curtis names it, The Broad Spectrum of Joy, that I started to wish that all beer books start with that as an introduction instead of a repeat of the brewing process that most beer books begin with.

Curtis then continues the conversation with his definition of Modern Beer, which is broken down into five pillars:

1. Focused on ingredients, their agriculture and provenance.
2. Invested in sustainability, and the preservation of the environment.
3. Focused on regionality and is driven by, and supportive of, its local communities.
4. Inclusive and equitability minded.

5. The beer is delicious.

That is a bold and probably utopian reach for breweries to achieve all five all the time but I do appreciate that the goals are not some easily reached, quick pat on the back for trying achievements. And when you delve into the heart of the book, you will see evidence of those pillars, especially number five.

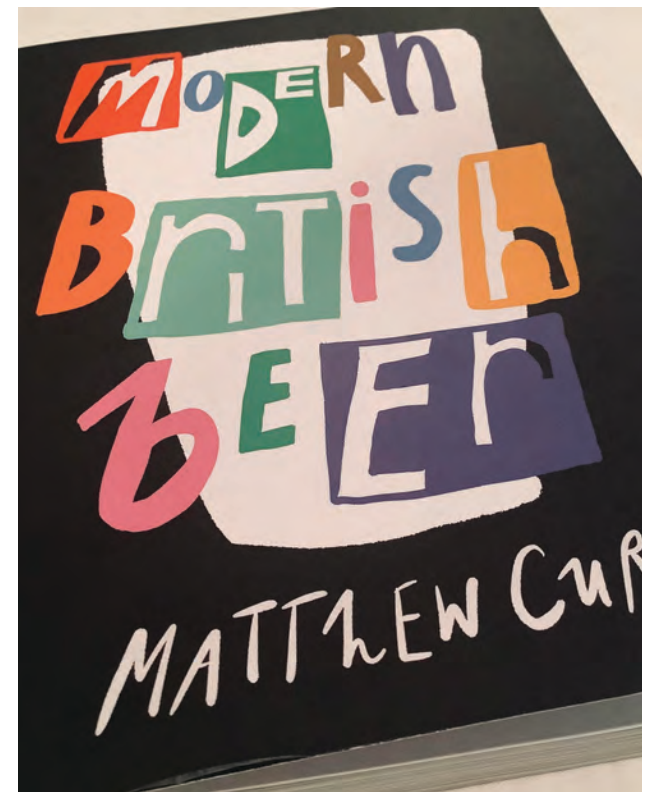
The brunt of the book is two to three page descriptions of beers that Curtis considers exemplars of Modern British Beer. There are a lot of English Bitters, but past that, the book covers many different styles from gose to hazy to amber. And though it is not a guidebook, per se, it admirably accomplishes what a guidebook should do. Get you thirsty and make you want to plan a trip. The Manchester and the Northwest chapters in particular had me looking up plane fares.

The eagle-eyed reader will see where California breweries influenced British brewers. Obviously, the impact of Sierra Nevada Pale Ale has sent ripples throughout fermentors across the world but Firestone Walker gets a tip of the hat, as does the whole West Coast IPA trend. To see how American beer favorites get reinterpreted in a different country is exciting and I cannot wait for British brewers to lob a trend back to the U.S. for us to reimagine.

Curtis does this all in a very conversational, I have to tell you about this beer, tone. He obviously has beer knowledge but isn't snooty about it and he has lived in various parts of the country but he isn't writing to tell you where to go or what to drink but more to give you his viewpoint on the beers that have stuck with him and why they do.

The only drawback to this format is that by the time Americans are back to traveling again that some of these beers may not be in the line-up to choose from, so I am hoping that Curtis is in the early stages of an update because I do not want to miss out on the next wave of Modern British beer.

*Sean Inman has been writing about beer since 2009 on his blog, Beer Search Party. He also was the beer editor for Food GPS.*



*Modern British Beer by Matthew Curtis  
Photo Credit: Sean Inman*

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## INLAND EMPIRE

# A Young Brewery Making Bold Statements

by Andrew Smith

They may have launched at an inopportune time. But, within twelve months, Oscar's Brewing Company is making a lot of noise. Head brewer, Joe Flores, is one of the most humble guys you'll ever meet. His ambitious beers, on the other hand, are making bold statements.

Flores worked his way around several breweries in Temecula and San Diego, winning several medals, before opening Oscar's. He's made plenty of friends along the way too, which is demonstrated by the many collaborations that Oscar's has brewed in its first year.

Oscar's Brewing is one half of the old Pat & Oscar's restaurant chain. They revamped the last remaining Pat & Oscar's, turning it into an upscale gastro brewpub. It's perfectly located, on a hill overlooking the Temecula duck pond, on the stretch of road that connects wine country to Old Town (brewery country).

Their food is fantastic, well worth a dining visit alone. In my first couple of visits, the beer program was just getting off the ground. They had a few solid house brews, supported by a variety of local guest taps, and collaborations.

Between my visits in March and August, things changed dramatically. The anticipated barrel program was bearing its first fruits. Flagships, like the West Coast IPA, were still around. But it was the treasure chest of barrel-aged beers that blew me away: Banana Clippings Imperial Stout (12% ABV), Zen and Two Knots Imperial Brown (11.2%), Clutching Clouds Triple IPA (10.5%), Heart is Blind Anniversary Stout (10%), and Heavy Balloons Red Sour (8%). That made for quite a sampling. There were so many big beers that I had to take them to go; canning-to-order has been one of the few silver linings of Covid. The collabs have also rolled out continuously - three on tap during my last visit.

Oscar's entrance on the Temecula beer scene has been so impressive that I had to invite Joe Flores to be featured in

the Beer Paper relaunch issue.

**Beer Paper: Congratulations, Joe! You've just passed your first year. Has it been every bit as easy as you thought it would be?**

Flores: (laughs) Not sure I would consider opening during a global pandemic easy. But I can say we did better than I expected. Our opening day was the day they closed indoor dining. We've been lucky to be able to stay open thanks to our massive patio.

**Beer Paper: Has the plan of action been different given what happened with Covid?**

Flores: Yes, without a doubt! The pandemic changed a lot and is still affecting us daily. We had to focus more on an outdoor dining experience and beer to go.

**Beer Paper: I visited you guys a couple of times in the first year. The beers were solid but not as adventurous as I'd expected. Was that a result of Covid?**

Flores: More a result of just opening and figuring out the new system. Even with years of brewing, coming into a new place like this with new equipment has its challenges and it's always safer to start simple while you get comfortable.

**Beer Paper: Then I visited in August and was completely blown away. Can you tell us how your offerings have transformed?**

Flores: It was always my plan to have a very wide range of beers with lots of experimentation. I just wanted to be comfortable on my system. Shortly after opening, I brewed lots of the beers you see on tap now or coming soon. But they had to age in barrels for months to be what I wanted.

**Beer Paper: Is the proliferation of barrel-aged beers a result of you being located in the middle of wine country?**

Flores: Being near wine country definitely helps. But a barrel program



The Impressive Barrel Program on Full Display  
Photo Credit: Andrew Smith



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*A Patio with a View, or a Duck Pond with a View*  
Photo Credit: Andrew Smith

was always in the plans since we started the remodel. Our barrels are displayed when you enter the building and that cove was actually made specifically for barrels. We always planned on working with local wineries and distilleries. That's happening more and more these days, which makes us happy for sure.

**Beer Paper:** *You've been doing some cool collaborations. You've obviously got a lot of good friends in the Temecula area.*

Flores: Yes! Collaborations are amazing, not just for cross promotion. They're also much fun. Getting to brew fun and exciting beers with my friends is something I've always enjoyed in this industry. The fact that the owners are so open to it truly makes me happy. Look for more collabs coming soon.

**Beer Paper:** *Who have been your main influences in creating your own style?*

Flores: That's a hard question. I can think of two individuals who have influenced my brewing the most: Guy Bartmess, formerly of Garage Brewing, and Grant Heuer of Gezellig Brewing in Iowa. I can honestly say I wouldn't be half the brewer without them.

**Beer Paper:** *Temecula is really booming as a craft beer town. What does that mean to you personally and professionally?*

Flores: It means I don't have to commute! (laughs) But really, it's been amazing to see and be a part of this local boom over the past few years. I remember being 21 and driving to Stone or Lost Abbey to get growlers. When Craft opened in Lake Elsinore, we were so happy. Since then, it seems like a new brewery opens every year. I love it. It's great for all

of us. It just boosts the reputation of the entire area.

**Beer Paper:** *How important has the food program been to the beer program?*

Flores: Huge! Without the amazing food program, I don't think I would have been able to make almost 50 batches of beer in our first year. That's a lot of beer for our little brewery. I couldn't be happier with the response we've gotten for our food.

**Beer Paper:** *It must give you an advantage that you're in such a great location and that you're the one brewery in Temecula with such great food.*

Flores: It certainly hasn't hurt us. It's always nice to hear from other owners how they are jealous of our spot. It is a truly unique venue and I couldn't be happier to be brewing on this beautiful pond in the middle of town, with amazing food.

**Beer Paper:** *Do people come in expecting the old Pat & Oscars?*

Flores: Yes! All the time! In the beginning, it was a bit of a hurdle because prices were increased and the menu was different. But, after trying our food and learning about the quality of our new ingredients, the response has been amazing.

**Beer Paper:** *Pat & Oscars was a chain. Do you see that as a viable model for OBC going forward?*

Flores: I could see it being like a Karl Strauss, if the owners wanted. But I think the plan is more unique concepts, with our beers on tap. It's hard to say what will happen. Time will tell.

**Beer Paper:** *What do we have to look forward to moving forward?*



*Joe Flores on the Brew Deck*  
Photo Courtesy of OBC

Flores: Lots of new beers. Plenty of collabs, not just with breweries. And new and fun events like beer and food pairing dinners. Not to mention the new barrel-aged beers coming every few months. We are actually working on our first bottle release. So, look for that in the near future.

**Beer Paper:** *Do you see the Temecula beer scene growing even more in future?*

Flores: It sure has the potential. I'm just not sure how much more growth we can expect during the pandemic. Let's hope this all goes away soon and the economy snaps back. Who doesn't want more beer?

**Beer Paper:** *What are your favorite local spots to hit on your days off?*

Flores: That's tough as I love to visit all the local breweries. I can say I usually find myself eating food with a beer at 8-Bit, and enjoying a beer with my friends at Solaris.

The past decade has seen Temecula expand beyond a wine destination into a craft beer destination too. Between Temecula and Murrieta, you'll find over a dozen breweries, a few of which are among the best in Southern California.

It hasn't taken Oscar's Brewing long to create its own legacy. Way back in March, I considered it worth a visit because they had great food. Now, with the barrel program in full flow, it's an essential craft beer spot.

*Andrew grew up in England and thought he knew everything about beer before landing on the California craft boom. He covers the Inland Empire more extensively on his blog at [CraftBeerIE.com](http://CraftBeerIE.com).*

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