

# The Germans Are Coming, the Germans Are Coming...Back



Photo Credit: Dennis Benson

by Tomm Carroll

Many of the German immigrants to the young United States in the 1800s started breweries. They also migrated as far west as California mid-century, especially once gold

was discovered in 1848, with hopes of striking it rich. They brought with them their thirst for lagerbier, and their expertise at brewing the same. By 1854, a German opened LA's first brewery, which

was followed by many others, most of them owned and operated by German immigrants.

Across the US, while some of those breweries prospered since, the quality of lagers suffered greatly. But

reminiscent of almost 200 years ago, US lager making is returning to the Germans' brewing expertise. And in Southern California, it seems the Germans themselves are coming back to the US with

that expertise. That's why Beer Paper is dedicating this issue to the re-emerging Teutonic influence on brewing lagers. We hope you enjoy it.

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## DRINK YOUR HISTORY

# THE GERMANS ARE COMING, THE GERMANS ARE COMING...BACK

by Tomm Carroll

It may have been settlers from the Netherlands who built the first commercial ale brewery on American soil in 1632 when the Dutch West India Company launched one in New Amsterdam (now New York City), which was then a Dutch settlement.

But more than two centuries later, it was German John Wagner who brewed the US' first lager beer with bottom-fermenting yeast brought back from his native Bavaria, in his saloon brewery in the Northern Liberties section of Philadelphia in 1840, according to a historical marker that now stands by the property. There's no record on what kind of lager it was, but it predates by two years the creation of the very first pale, clear Pilsner in Bohemia (now Czechia) — by Josef Groll, a Bavarian.

By most accounts, the commercial brewing of beer in California started later that decade in 1849 (before it was even a state!) with another German beer maker, the Adam Schuppert Brewery, in the area's then-largest city, San Francisco. This was immediately following the Mexican-American War (1846-48), which resulted in Mexico ceding the territory known as Alta California to the United States, which granted it statehood a couple years later (1850). That rather hasty acceptance into the Union was likely due in part to the discovery of gold along the American River near Sacramento shortly before the end of the war, immediately prompting the "Gold Rush."

Germans, arguably the majority of immigrants (along with the Irish) to the new world during that period — largely because of the burgeoning Revolutions of 1848, a series of political upheavals in Europe — had already migrated as far west as California, and now even more of them joined the quest for gold with hopes of striking it rich. They brought with them their thirst for lagerbier, and their expertise at brewing the same.

A good deal of them also made their way down to the then-tiny city of Los Angeles, which had a population just north of 1,600 in 1850, when it was incorporated. Within several years, Los Angeles had its first two breweries, both founded by Germans: the New York Brewery (Christopher Kuhn and/or Christian Henne, 1854) and Gambirius Brewery (Kiln Messer, 1856), with many more following over the next decades and into the next century.

Most notable of these was the Philadelphia Brewery (1873), which was eventually purchased in 1882 by two German immigrant brewers, Joseph Maier and George Zobelein, both of whom previously worked at the New York



Joseph Maier

All Photos Credit: CemeteryGuide.com

Brewery. The soon renamed Maier & Zobelein Brewery would go on to become a regional success and LA's then-largest brewery, literally ushering Southland brewing into the 20th century before splitting into the Maier Brewery and the Los Angeles (aka "Eastside") Brewery in 1907, both of which continued in some form until the 1960s and '70s.

### Captains of Industrial Lagers?

Indeed, the history of our nation's whole brewing industry was dominated by German immigrants, whose names are as indelible as the successful brands they founded: Eberhard Anheuser, Adolphus Busch, Frederick Miller, Joseph Schlitz, Frederick Pabst, Adolph Coors and David Yuengling, to name but a few. Ironically, all but arguably the last have contributed to the industrialization, commodification and all-around dumbing down of the very lagers (especially Pilsners) — and influenced consumers' preference therefor — on which they built the US brewing industry, and their corporations.

All of which ultimately resulted in the craft brewing renaissance in America, beginning in the mid-1970s, when new microbreweries, and then brewpubs, began brewing almost exclusively ales, with distinctive flavors (and colors), and eschewing lagers (particularly the lighter colored ones), the reputations of which the macrobreweries had progressively sullied over the decades.

But now, for the last dozen years or so, more and more small breweries are beginning to make very good craft lagers, using traditional brewing ingredients and not relying on adjuncts. And while the oft-predicted "Year of the Lager" still hasn't quite arrived (Any hoppy beer with the letters I, P and A in its name, regardless of what it actually is, still rules the craft roost), bottom-fermented craft beers (by *saccharomyces pastorianus*, aka lager yeast) are continuously making headway. US brewers have been getting their German on, so to speak.

Many craft brewers across the country are now even dedicating their breweries or brewpubs practically exclusively to lager-making, including Bierstadt Lagerhaus in Denver; Urban Chestnut Brewery in St. Louis (hometown of you-know-which big beer behemoth); Jack's Abby Craft Lagers in Framingham, Massachusetts; Chuckanut Brewery in Washington State and Oregon; and lots more.

### A Local Look at Lagerbier

All of which is why *Beer Paper* decided to publish this special theme issue dedicated to the re-emerging Teutonic influence on brewing (mainly lagers). In Southern California, there are many small breweries crafting some excellent lagers — some even using horizontal lagering tanks. Several craft beer producers in Orange County who are making some award-winning traditional-style German lagers, are rounded up by the **OC Beat** column (page 12).

## US Brewers are getting their German on

But the only area brewery that has been producing mostly lager styles for over 12 years now is **Enegren Brewing** in Moorpark, Ventura County (page 6). Not surprisingly, virtually every beer it produces is German-style (hence, non-lagers like Hefeweizen, Altbier, Kölsch, etc., are included).

Somewhat reminiscent of almost 200 years ago (Yuengling, the oldest in the US, was founded in Pottsville, Pennsylvania as Eagle Brewery in 1929), brewing in the US seems to be coming back to the Germans' brewing expertise. Well, to make this "coming full circle" cycle even fuller, at least in Southern California, it looks like it's actually the Germans who are coming back to the US with their brewing expertise. Perhaps (hopefully) to reclaim their communal beer-making heritage and right the wrongs of their ancestral emigrants to the new world, who long ago allowed their beloved lagerbier



George Zobelein

to descend into industrial swill for the American masses — while convincing them to drink it. And they got very rich doing it. Something the breweries in Germany did *not* do.

There are two examples of this right here in LA: After contract brewing traditional German-style beers for some seven years, a pair of brewers from Hamberg recently opened their **Two Coast Brewing** as a brick-and-mortar in Gardena (page 8). Also, **Mahrs Bräu**, a historic brewery from Bamberg, has established a unique footprint in the United States, starting in the greater Los Angeles area (page 10).

Just as German-style lagers eventually replaced British-originated ales in the early days of brewing in the fledgling United States, so too did the theme, and the beer list, of the longtime Silver Lake landmark **The Red Lion Tavern**, which transformed from English pub to German beer hall and garden some 60 years ago (page 14).

This issue of *Beer Paper* is best read accompanied by a stein, krug, maß, seidel, tankard, willi becher, pocall, or even a stange of your favorite lager. Prost!

*Tomm Carroll is a beer writer / judge / educator / historian / collector / traveler / drinker (not always in that order). He has just been shortlisted for the 2023 British Guild of Beer Writers Awards in the Best Beer Communicator, Regional Media category for several articles from Beer Paper over the past year. He can be reached at beerscribe@earthlink.net.*





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## INTERVIEW

# The Lager Focus of Enegren Brewing

by Daniel Drennon

Enegren Brewing was founded in 2010 by two brothers, Chris and Matt Enegren, and their pal Joe Nascenzi. The three attended Loyola Marymount together where Chris and Joe played on the lacrosse team. They bonded over beer and Chris, a mechanical engineering student, not only led the three into home brewing...he envisioned how he could actually design his own brewhouse systems. And that he did. Each evolution of Enegren as a brewery, from their first 10-gallon home brew system to the current 15 BBL professional brewhouse, was designed by Chris.

And then there is their dedication to brewing almost exclusively lagers in hop-crazed California. Sure. There have been other breweries which eschewed the call to focus on IPAs, but over a decade (a longevity which only includes handful of local breweries), Enegren is a rare example of sticking to their proverbial guns: a profound love of German-inspired lagers.

Enegren states this on their website as to why they brew: "There is something special about beer. Something uniquely intrinsic about its nature that brings people together to celebrate life, feats



Top: Jon Shepherd, Tommy Suwara, Daniel McGuire, James Potter

Bottom: John Bird, Steven Bradley, Chris Enegren, Sarkis Zakrian

Photo Courtesy of Enegren Brewing

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of strength and the honor earned from a hard day's work." They go on to ask us to raise a glass to the glory and power of beer. Now that we are seeing a welcome return to an appreciation for locally crafted German-style beers, Enegren has been setting the benchmark for well over a decade.

**DRENNON:** I've interviewed a lot of brewers, but you are the first that had a homebrewing operation in your campus dorm and met your brewing partner on a lacrosse field. Of course, the third partner is your brother Matt. Take us through the discovery of home brewing and the relationships that brought the three of you together.

**ENEGBREN:** I was a Mechanical Engineering major at Loyola Marymount University and I was always involved in drinking beer and building things. One night I was at a BJ's and I was looking at a schematic of the brewing process and I immediately realized I needed to figure out how to build something like that. I went to a local homebrew shop, bought the typical malt extract brewing equipment and that was the start. After a few brews, I got on my CAD computer and designed a structure and piping system and built my first all grain system soon after. I brewed on this with my brother Matt for a year at LMU in the backyard of the house I was renting. I moved into an apartment the next year and my friend Joe (Nascenzi), who I played lacrosse with, offered up his garage in addition to his help in brewing. That kicked off the Matt, Joe and Chris brew team.

**DRENNON:** You went from a 3-gallon homebrew system to a 10-gallon homebrew system to a 3-barrel commercial system to your current 15-barrel pro system. You designed them all yourself. What was your technical skill set that enabled you to design your own systems?

**ENEGBREN:** My degree in Mechanical Engineering really came in handy when it came to mechanical system design. Being able to use CAD to design everything before I built anything was invaluable. To add to that, I was also working as an Automation Engineer at Medtronic where I spent my time designing factory automation systems. I worked for a German Electrical engineer named Marco who I learned everything programming and electrical engineering related from.

After work, I would combine everything I was learning during the day with all of the scrap automation parts I could get a hold of and integrate everything into my homebrew system. It wasn't long before that system had a full control system with a 15" color touch screen.

When we realized it was time to go pro, I contacted Premier Stainless and purchased a 3bbl system that I was able to custom design and incorporate all of my automation into since the systems were mainly pushbutton and basic.

A few years later, Rob Soltys, the owner of Premier Stainless offered me a part time job designing automated brew systems for them and that's when I left Medtronic and was fully in the brewing industry. I would



then spend the day designing automated brew systems for other breweries and the nights designing and wiring my own custom 15 bbl system.

**DRENNON:** *Was there an epiphany moment when you realized you wanted to open your own brewery?*

ENEGREN: I always wanted to start my own company, but It wasn't until the time I pulled the cover off the first fermenting bucket and tasted the first beer that I realized that brewing would be the rabbit hole I'd go down. For me, it's a complete dream job. I'm constantly designing new systems and able to run a brewery where I only make beer I like with some great employees.

**DRENNON:** *You focus almost exclusively on lagers. What's up with that given California's famed love of hoppy pales and IPAs?*

ENEGREN: Matt, Joe and I have never been into IPAs. We were more interested in German and other European styles and started our first commercial brewery with a focus on that. As an engineer, I have always been impressed with the German brewing methods since they involve a lot more brewhouse technology and the beers are a lot harder to manage properly.

**DRENNON:** *Do you have a brewing philosophy?*

ENEGREN: Our philosophy is that we brew beers that we are passionate about. We expanded our brewery slowly but steadily on the philosophy that we would keep growing as we needed to be able to handle demand for our beers. Pushing primarily lagers was tough at the start because most beer buyers at the time just thought that lager meant cheap beer. The day people don't want to drink well-made German-style lager will be the day that I'll find something else to obsess over. To me, it's sad to see brewers begrudgingly talk about hype styles they are forced to brew to justify expenses. Brewing takes way



Enegren Collector Steins

Photo Credit: Matthew Garcia @momentsinbeer

too much work and being passionate about it is something that gets myself and the rest of our brewers through tough days. I can't manage spending the time I do brewing to make a beer that I don't plan on drinking.

**DRENNON:** *Aside from the focus on lagers, what else differentiates Enegren Brewing from the hundreds of other options beer drinkers have to choose from?*

ENEGREN: Our focus on German styles in general is what really differentiates us. I would describe our brewery as German-style, but lager focused. Having a focus has enabled us the really dive deep into mastering a few styles instead of trying to be great at everything, which is never possible. We used to make an IPA, but now we just send people to our friend's breweries where they dream of hops at night instead of decoction mashes.

**DRENNON:** *You are one of the older independent craft breweries in the region. What are the most important lessons you have learned?*

ENEGREN: The most important lesson I've learned is to just stick to what you're passionate about and that will never fail you. When we first got our current location off to a start, we had a lot of styles we were brewing but were really passionate about our lagers. It wasn't until our distributor at the time told us to "knock it off with the German stuff and make fruit IPA" that I said screw this, I'm brewing what I want. Being focused made our brand what it is today.

**DRENNON:** *What, if anything, would you do differently if you could go back in time?*

ENEGREN: I really don't have any regrets. It's easy to say that I would have built a bigger brewery from the start, but I

don't think we would have gotten to where we are today if we didn't take a lot of the steps we took and faced a lot of the issues we faced.

**DRENNON:** *What are your goals and what is your vision moving forward?*

ENEGREN: My goal is to continue brewing the beers we are passionate and letting the brewery grow as big as it can naturally.

**DRENNON:** *Between talent and work ethic, which is more important?*

Having work ethic but no talent is like wanting to dig a hole without a shovel. I think both are needed.

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

Beer Nerd.



Brewhouse built by Chris Enegren



Enegren Brewing patio

Photo Courtesy of Enegren Brewing

Photo Courtesy of Enegren Brewing



## TO LIVE AND DRINK IN LA

# TWO COAST'S TEUTONIC TONICS PASSING ON THE CULTURE IN LIQUID FORM

by Tomm Carroll



Roger and Jan of Two Coast Brewing

Photo Credit: Tomm Carroll

Seven years ago this November, at the 6th Annual Local Craft Beer Festival held in the parking lot of Rock & Brews in El Segundo, among the dozen area breweries pouring their wares was a brand new contract brewery called Two Coast. What made it stand out from the crowd was not its lack of a beer-making facility, but what it poured: authentic, traditional, German-style beers. Authentic because the two founders, Brewmaster Jan (pronounced “Yon”) Dreier, and Brewer and Master-of-Everything-Else Roger Kunsemüller are German natives.

“That was the first time we were out in public pouring our beer, and it was really our first test to see if what we thought would be an acceptable beer would really be accepted by people,” Roger acknowledged in a recent interview with *Beer Paper*. “Everybody came over and drank our beer because [the sadly defunct] King Harbor was over there near us, with their super-heavy-duty IPA. People came over to drink our beer, saying, ‘I really need this just to calm the palate a little bit.’ And we thought, ‘Maybe we’re onto something; maybe this is something that we should pursue.’”

Indeed, they were onto something — and coincidentally on the 500th anniversary year of the (in)famous German Purity Law, the Reinheitsgebot. This writer

was in attendance and can recall that aside from offering a welcome respite from the hop bombs dominating the fest, Two Coast’s Kölsch was also much more traditional than other LA-brewed takes on that style at the time.

“We were entering the equation at that point where the pendulum started to swing back towards lagers again in the US,” adds Jan in the interview. “And people started to appreciate the fact that well-made lagers are actually not Budweiser.” Interjects Roger: “Right, but we still had to explain to a lot of people what a Kölsch is back then. You don’t have to do that nowadays. Pilsner has been really well-known for a while, but now so is Helles, Dunkel, Schwarzbier...”

Speaking of nowadays, let’s flash-forward to the present: They *did* pursue this thing. After contract brewing at Hermitage in San Jose for several years, and throughout the pandemic — which hit after Roger and Jan leased a brewery space, but before it could be built out — Two Coast continued its pursuit and now has its own fully functioning 15bbl brewhouse in Gardena in an industrial park off Figueroa St. near Rosecrans Ave. It includes a taproom, inside which this interview took place in early October, over their traditional golden Festbier, called Saint Father.

### Hamburger Pride

Hailing from Hamburg, Germany’s second largest city (after Berlin), Roger and Jan have been friends since they met while working as reporters at the *Hamburger Morgenpost* daily newspaper in the 1980s. They both moved to the United States, separately, and to opposite coasts, in the early 1990s — Jan to Los Angeles in 1992 (during the LA riots) and Roger to New York (landing on the day of the first World Trade Center bombing) the following year. “We were thrill-seekers from overseas!” jokes Roger.

So *that’s* where the name for their brewery comes from. “Yeah, that’s one of the reasons,” confirms Roger. “The other one is that Hamburg is between the Baltic Sea and the North Sea, so it’s two more coasts.”

“Also, our brewery’s logo is based on the crest of the city of our hometown,” explains Jan. “We modified it a little bit. We took the Christian cross off and put an American star on it. And we shortened the towers and made it a lighthouse. But otherwise you can see the influences pretty clearly.”

“Like everybody who is from Hamburg, or lives in Hamburg, we are ridiculously proud to be from there,” Roger confesses. Yet even though we had absolutely nothing to do with that, because our parents are the ones who brought us there, but everybody from Hamburg is very Hamburg-ish.

And we had the Beatles very early on!”

### LA Homebrewer

Not long after relocating to LA, Jan

visited a friend who was homebrewing. “It fascinated me; the beer was godawful, but it was something I wanted to try my hand at,” he relates. “So I purchased Charlie Papazian’s book, *The Complete Joy of Homebrewing*, and made one batch with extract — but the flavor profile was not anything I liked.

“I bought a little more equipment and made my first all-grain recipe, which is essentially the same Altbier, Cryptic, that we sell here,” Jan continues. “It’s almost unchanged, except for scaling up the recipe for commercial production.”

He read and read some more, and homebrewed other styles, purchasing ingredients and equipment at the sadly defunct Culver City Home Brew Supply, the former home base of the Pacific Gravity Homebrew Club. “I never joined a homebrew club, but I would occasionally pump the Pacific Gravity guys for advice,” Jan explains. “It must be something that this mixture of slight OCD plus Germaness worked really well for me, and I eventually thought that this might be an interesting thing to do commercially.”

In the early 2000s he started getting more serious about brewing and made contacts and friends “with people who are way more advanced than I have ever been” at the Technical University of Berlin, where he also took a couple courses as part of his brewing education.

Meanwhile, back in New York, Roger consulted for a while for Montauk Brewing on Long Island. “They made their beer upstate at F.X. Matt, but I advised them on what styles to make,” he explains. “And whenever I came to LA to visit Jan, we made some homebrewed beer; it was kind of adventurous and fun.



Cold beer and Cold War memories

Photo Credit: Daniel Drennon



“That was my exposure to brewing, aside from growing up with parents who are from the whole southeastern hop-growing region, Spalt, where there’s a lot of breweries,” Roger recalls. “That’s how I grew up. I had my first beer when I was nine with my mom; it was a Rauchbier from Schlenkerla. It was terrible, like drinking out of an ashtray. To this day, I still think it’s terrible.”

In 2016, he finally decided to move to LA to join Jan in a brewing venture. “We talked about it over the years, and so we finally decided, ‘Let’s just do it.’ We just dove in basically. So whatever I know about this, I know from Jan. He also gave me books to read, including the Bible of all commercial teaching books, *Technology of Brewing and Malting*.”

“Yeah, that was my main book, and I still go back to it,” interjects Jan. “Because you can’t keep everything in your head.”

“The fact of the matter is that we make the beer that we make because we just couldn’t find the beer that we wanted to drink here,” states Roger. “So that was really the driving force in our forming Two Coast Brewing.”

Drinking German

As mentioned above, they brew mostly “authentic German heritage beers” (according to the brewery’s website *twocoastbrewing.com*), mostly adhering to the Reinheitsgebot. Aside from the previously referenced Kölsch and Festbier, Two Coast brews Pilsner, Hefeweizen, Dunkelweizen, and the Altbier (Cryptic), the commercial version of Jan’s second-ever homebrew.

Interestingly, when the beer was first released and just called Altbier, no one bought it. “It falls in this grey zone,” explains Roger. “It’s essentially a Pilsner that looks really dark — like a Stout, but it isn’t. So the people who are hoping for a Porter or Stout are deeply disappointed, while the people who drink only yellow beer don’t touch it because it’s dark. We keep telling people, ‘Don’t be afraid of the dark.’ If they try it, they find it’s delicious.”

“It was also a challenge to educate serving staff in accounts,” according to Jan. “Even if the beer buyers liked the beer, it sat

there because they didn’t know how to explain it correctly, even though we tried our best and gave them cards with the description.”

Their solution was to drop the name Altbier altogether (Roger: “Alt means old — that’s not really appealing”; Jan: “People didn’t understand it and thought it meant ‘alternative’”), and gave it the moniker Cryptic. “And we call it a California Dark Ale because we think it’s a dark beer that you can take to the beach,” says Roger. Now, Cryptic is one of the top sellers *von faß* (German for “on tap”) in the Gardena taproom.

But the best-selling beer there is GPA, or German Pale Ale, one of two non-traditional beers. It was originally brewed because customers were always asking for an IPA or a hoppy beer. “It’s a very different animal from your regular IPA,” Roger offers, while Jan admits, “The GPA was outside of the normal style regimens for Germans, but I felt comfortable about it because I had been contract brewing at Hermitage, where I learned quite a bit about IPAs — more than I ever wanted to know. Also, I didn’t want to use the same Citra, Centennial and Columbus combination, so we went with all German hops.”

Brewed with Nordbrauer, Bavaria Mandarin and Huell Melon, with spelt in the grain bill (one of Two Coast’s deviations from Reinheitsgebot), the GPA, along with Saint Father, is the brewery’s strongest beer (both 6.2% abv). “It’s not super-strong but the main reason people drink it is because it’s our highest abv, and hoppiest, beer,” Roger adds.

The other non-traditional (and Reinheitsgebot-noncompliant) beer on the Two Coast taplist is AKA — for American Kream (sic) Ale. “AKA is a great summer drink,” says Jan. “It also provides a great basis for a Radler, Shandy or a Michelada.”

Cream Ale, basically a German-American style which originated in the US in the mid-to-late 19th century, was made by breweries (most of which were owned by Germans), particularly those that could not afford the new technology of artificial refrigeration, to compete with authentic lagers by fermenting ale yeast at colder, almost lager temperatures. Like lagers of



Enjoying the fruits of their labor

Photo Credit: Tomm Carroll

the time, they were brewed with adjuncts such as rice and corn for lighter body and flavor.

“We feel like we’re passing on the culture in liquid form,” Roger explains, citing the pair’s dedication to recreating classic German beer styles right here in LA. “So we see ourselves as cultural preservationists in our very modest way. You know, we try to maintain what the beer style is. We try to make a Pilsner according to what a Pilsner should be. And the same with a Kölsch — you can’t just take Kölsch yeast and pour it into whatever wort you just made, and call the beer a Kölsch. It needs to be brewed the right way.”

“My competency lies in German styles,” Jan declares. “And there are still many others to explore.” Speaking of which, Two Coast’s newest beer, which is now pouring in the taproom, is a Rotbier, a Franconian Red Lager, which is mostly associated with the city of Nuremberg. Also on his brew-to-do list, he says, is a traditional Gose, originating from the town of Goslar in Lower Saxony, and next summer, a Weißbier — however he did not specify whether that will be a Berliner or a Bavarian type.

Although given Roger’s aforementioned disdain for the style, there will likely not be a Rauchbier upcoming from Two Coast.



Fermenting a revolution in craft beer

Photo Credit: Tomm Carroll

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## COVER STORY

# INVADERS FROM MAHRS

## ‘TAKE US TO YOUR BREWER’

by Tomm Carroll

“There are two German cities that all people associate with beer. Munich, of course, and Bamberg, both in Bavaria,” claims Stephan Michel, the fourth generation owner and brewmeister of Mahrs Bräu, which is based in the Wunderberg section of that second city. And in case you’re wondering about his declaration, Bamberg is a city of only about 70,000 residents, yet has nine breweries in the heart of town — but around 250 if you include the surrounding countryside.

“We have so many breweries in Bamberg and around the area, but unless they come to visit, how many of the breweries do people in the US know of? Only Schlenkerla and Spezial, who both do the [smoked] Rauchbier, and Mahrs, where we do the original U Beer.”

The what? I can almost hear readers who have never been to Bamberg, or tried this beer style before, saying to themselves right now.

First off, it’s pronounced “Ooh” beer, as Germans pronounce the letter “U,” not “You” beer. Secondly, U is short for *Ungespundet*, which literally means “unbunged.” In other words, the bung hole in the cask of lager was left unsealed during the secondary fermentation, resulting in less carbonation (making it somewhat similar to a British cask-conditioned ale) and a more complex, rounded flavor.

Why should you care about all this as a Southern California craft beer drinker? Because Mahrs’ U Beer is available now — and fresh — locally. But we’ll get to that in a bit; you need to know more about this historical beer style first, so read on...

Let’s let Stephan explain the name, and its origins: “These were typical Kellerbiers back in the day, and are still being served in Bamberg. *Ungespundet* means it wasn’t spundet [bunged] at the storage. So it’s an unfiltered Amber beer with lower carbonation, more flavor and not too much CO2 in the beer.

“On our label the first time, we had ‘*Ungespundet* Kellerbier,’ but I thought, ‘That’s way too long of a name to order a beer,’” he continues. “Most of my customers who came to Mahrs said, ‘I want to have a U.’ And everybody knew what that meant: U beer equals *Ungespundet* Kellerbier. Like Americans, Germans like to cut words down. It’s a shortcut, like Bud for Budweiser; ‘Give me a Bud.’ Or ‘Bitte ein Bit’ [a Bit, please] for Germany’s Bitburger beer. I created a brand name with the U because people liked it, and this is now the shortest beer order in the world — ‘A U’ — according to the Guinness Book of World Records.”

But what’s the style, and the background of the U Beer?

“Actually, the first background of U Beer was a Märzen. There were tons of breweries making U Beer in the countryside around Bamberg, where my grandfather was from. My family were farmers, and every village had a brewery,” Stephan relates. “The water in Bamberg was very hard and there was no way to reduce the hardness in it. So it was not possible to really brew a Pilsner beer there, because the bitterness would be very harsh, and the color would not be very golden or very light. So that’s why a lot of people brewed these unfiltered, amber-colored, low-carbonated beers.

“As a kid, I remember the old cellars, where the beer was in wood barrels before aluminum came in; everybody



Wolfgang Behr and Stephan Michel of Mahrs Bräu of America

All Photos Credit: Dennis Benson

had storage in these wooden casks,” he adds. “And those barrels didn’t have a spunt; it was open. So they couldn’t really keep a lot of CO2, and most of the beers, when you poured them into a glass, looked flat. They had very big bubbles that went quickly away. But the mix of the malt made it a good beer.

“In the 1960s, Kellerbiers became more and more popular and the unfiltered lagers took over. And compared to a regular Pilsner or Helles, which have about 5.1 or 5.2 grams of CO2 in the beer, the U Beer has just 4.1 grams. For U beer, it’s more the low-carbonated malt flavor of the body that’s important.”

Mahrs’ U Beer has become the brewery’s number one core beer, and has been distributed to the US as an import. You may have seen — and tried — it in the past at a bottle shop or beer bar that specializes in European imports. Or if you’ve attended any of the Firestone Walker International Beer Festivals in Paso Robles (except for 2022), Stephan was there at the Mahrs Bräu booth pouring it, along with his Pilsner and other beers.

It is also the Bamberg brewery’s best-selling beer worldwide. Which is why once Mahrs stopped exporting its beers internationally during Covid, Stephan rethought his distribution strategy outside of Europe.

### Mahrs Needs Breweries

Willkommen to Mahrs Bräu of America. This new partnership between Stephan and his longtime friend and

fellow Bamberger Wolfgang Behr — an international film producer who spends a fair amount of time in the greater Los Angeles area, working out of Malibu — is bringing freshly brewed (under the direction of Stephan) Mahrs beer to the US, starting right here in Southern California.

Now Stephan is no stranger to collaborating with breweries around the world, including Birrificio Lambrate in Italy, Naparbier in Spain, Mikkeller in Denmark, Lervig in Norway, Omnipollo in Sweden, BrewDog in the UK, and Yeastie Boys in New Zealand. He also has quite a few co-brews with US breweries already on his resume, including Sierra Nevada, Stone, Avery, Bagby Beer, and Arizona Wilderness.

But this new project appears to be an unprecedented international collaboration involving the contract brewing of a long-established European brand at a small American craft brewery — in this case Malibu Brewing Company’s brewing facility in Westlake Village — to begin producing Mahrs Bräu’s core beers: U Beer, Bohemian Pilsner and Helles (the last coming very soon) on American soil.

“I had decided many years ago to brew my beer in the States because it doesn’t make sense for me to travel or to ship beer around,” says Stephan, who first visited the US, including California, 30 years ago, and attended UCSB in Santa Barbara before going to brewing school at Doemens Akademie in Germany and taking over the reins at the family business. “I like what all my American



brewer friends are doing and have a lot of respect for their tradition and hard-working spirit. That's why I wanted to come here and find the right people to work with because I want to bring freshness to my customers and 100% good-quality, authentic German-style beers.

"My best friend Wolfgang and I talked about this project for many, many years," he adds. And the time for this project was after COVID — to do a restart with my brand internationally, so we can start again in America, as well as Australia and Japan."

His partner, the self-described "behind-the-scenes guy" dealing with finances, contracts, distribution and sales, agrees. "Since the late '90s, there was this vision of Stephan and I brewing here and maybe having some kind of a microbrewery," Wolfgang recalls. "All that started when we were hanging out one summer together at the Santa Barbara Brewing Company on State Street. We were having the beer and enjoying the lifestyle, those amazing weekends at the beach, and we always said, 'Okay, this is our dream. This is something we have to somehow go after and conquer.' So it started back then.

"But now, since I'm here, and especially since COVID, when Mahrs Bräu stopped being imported here — and my spending more time in the LA area not being able to drink the best beer in the world at home in Bamberg — I tried to motivate Stephan to really take this step, and at least try it," he continues. "So many people always said, 'Don't do it, it's not going to work, blah, blah, blah.' But I told him, 'Whatever other people say and whatever they have experienced, we have to experience it ourselves or we'll be mad at ourselves that we never tried it, so at least now let's try it — it's the right time.'"

For Stephan, it all comes down to the water. "We talked to some very good brewers, but for me it is very important where we can get the best water, because we bring all the other ingredients from Germany; we get our malt from Bamberg and all of our hops from Hallertau," he explains. "So before I even do a collaboration with anyone, I get the water from them and ship it to my laboratory in Germany, where they make me a report. And from there I can start talking to the brewers and see where can we go, or what can we do."

"And we were able to do it, starting right here on our doorstep," Wolfgang adds, referencing Mahrs Bräu of America's first batches brewed in Southern California. The partners are aware that they have to expand their contract brewing to other appropriate stateside craft breweries.

"I totally understand that a lot of importers might be a little scared of this project, because when you have



**Michel, Behr, and Beer Paper's Daniel Drennon visit David Hall at Chapman Crafted Brewery**

old beer, and then some German brewers come in and brew and sell fresh beer, it's a different thing," Stephan acknowledges. "This is actually our philosophy for Mahrs Bräu of America — I have a lot of a lot of friends and have had some of the best times of my life in America, so I want to give something back: fresh, authentic German lagers."

#### Malibrewed Mahrs

The locally brewed Mahrs' U and Pils beers were originally taste-tested at a private tap takeover in late spring, and "it was a great international kind of gathering of friends, and everybody loved the beer," according to Wolfgang. Also, those two beers were served at the Mahrs Bräu booth at Firestone's Invitational this past June (without mention that they were brewed in Southern California), where they also went over well, with both people who have drank it before, and newcomers.

"It was very interesting also in Paso Robles," he continues. "Lots of the people there knew the original U and the original Pils because we had poured it there and in the US before, but that was imported. The old fans who knew the originals were amazed. They said, 'Jesus, this is the beer! This is the original beer, but it's so fresh!' They loved it. And also people who never had it before came back and stood in the line for more because they enjoyed it so much."

The men from Mahrs have maintained a list of every venue in California that used to stock the beers when they were imported, and have been contacting them about now carrying the locally brewed versions. Interest has been very high, Wolfgang reports.

Mahrs beers are currently available on tap and/or in cans at Malibu Brewing's taproom/eatery in Trancas Market, as well as at such venues as Neptune's Net in Malibu, Zinqué in Malibu, Wades Wines in Westlake Village, Pizzeria Bianco in DTLA, Bar & Garden in Culver City, Pedalers Fork in Calabasas, Fluid State Beer Garden in Ventura, Lama Dog in Santa Barbara, and Pier 46 Seafood in Templeton. For an updated list, visit [mahrsusa.com](http://mahrsusa.com) and click on the "Where Can I Get It?" link.

Prost to Mahrs Bräu of America, the brewery that put the U (Ooh) in Malibu!

*Tomm Carroll is a beer writer / judge / educator / historian / collector / traveler / drinker (not always in that order). He has just been shortlisted for the 2023 British Guild of Beer Writers Awards in the Best Beer Communicator, Regional Media category for several articles from Beer Paper over the past year. He can be reached at [beerscribe@earthlink.net](mailto:beerscribe@earthlink.net).*



**Stephan Michel and Wolfgang Behr**



*Photo Courtesy of Mahrs Bräu of America*



## OC BEAT

## OC BREWING'S DEUTSCHLAND CONNECTION

by David Mulvihill



A who's who of brewers gathered at GameCraft's LagCon 2023 to discuss lager brewing: Mike Crea (Unsung), Liam Wynn (Solaris), Victor Novak (Figuerroa Mountain), Jesse Sundstrom (Ten Mile), Julian Shrager (Beachwood), Jeff Bagby (Bagby Beer), Andrew Moy (GameCraft), Brennan Perry (Tenma) Photo Credit: Christina Ramirez

The increase in dominance of classic German-style beers on craft brewery menus across Southern California speaks both to the growth in its popularity and a continued step-up in the overall quality of craft beer. In accordance with the *Reinheitsgebot* German purity law (originally established in 1516), ingredients are limited to malt, hops, yeast and water. A brewer's ability to master process, technique and pureness of ingredients rises to the top with no room for masking flaws via adjuncts, flavorings, etc.

Orange County has been blessed with a number of world class brewers who possess a passion for brewing, and the ability to brew amazing and award winning German-style lagers and ales. Many have opined that their efforts and successes in brewing these styles have also contributed to improving and advancing their overall brewing of styles across the board. Support for this opinion can be evidenced by awards they have received.

**Paths to World-Class:** There are a couple of paths we'll explore in this column that Orange County brewers of German styles have taken in perfecting their craft.

At least three OC brewers have completed the World Brewing Academy's Master Brewer Program, a hands-on intensive international program which takes place in part at the Siebel Institute in Chicago,

with the balance completed at Doemens Academy in Munich, Germany. There, in addition to working with German Brewmasters and scientists at Doemens, students also spend time working in Munich-area breweries.

**Trevor Walls:** Refer to last month's *Beer Paper* feature for more info on this year's Alpha King, Trevor Walls. After initially getting his feet wet in the brewing arenas of Ballast Point's Home Brew Mart and The Bruery, Trevor Walls' desire was to advance his professional training with the solid formal foundation the WBA Master Brewer program offered. His attraction to German beer styles grew during his immersive course time in Southern Germany, styles he would incorporate into his brewing repertoire upon his return, both while brewing at Pizza Port and ultimately, currently, and more prominently at Anaheim's Brewery X. The Brewery X team was awarded a GABF 2022 Bronze medal in the Bohemian-style Pilsner category for its Battlesnake Pilsner [sic]. A selection of German-style brews can also be found on X's taplist, most recently: Kristalweizen and Schwarzbier.

**Dylan Mobley, 2013:** As an avid homebrewer with professional aspirations, Dylan Mobley applied for and secured a coveted spot in the WBA Master Brewers Program prior to his professional brewing foray. Mobley's Munich-based lager brewing training further developed his

affinity for the same. After graduating Siebel, Dylan brewed at Stone Brewing Company and Angel City Brewery before his term as head brewer at Bottle Logic. In pursuit of opening his own brewery, Dylan would later join the Rad Beer Company team as a founding member and head brewer. Rad's core beer list includes King Minutia, German-style pilsner, as well as a rotation of German brews throughout the year. A Helles and a Festbier were also flowing the last time this reporter visited Rad.

**Andrew Moy:** GameCraft Brewing's Andrew Moy would win a GABF medal before leaving Huntington Beach's Riip Beer Company to attend the WBA course. During those early days as head brewer for Riip, he was awarded 2016 GABF Silver for Super Cali, in the highly contested American IPA category. Reportedly, with the win under his belt, Moy's grandfather offered to pay the academy's tuition, an advancement opportunity he wouldn't pass up. As reported to *Beer Paper* in April, 2022, Moy expressed that the value of the course to him as a brewer was immeasurable. Upon graduating and returning home he connected with Scott Cebula, who was working on opening GameCraft Brewing in Laguna Hills, a brewpub that would include a prominent focus on lager beers, as well as an amazing brewhouse equipped with horizontal lagering tanks. Scott was in search of a lager-brewer who could also brew a spectrum of other styles

craft beer fans would be thirsting for. Moy joined the team as a founding member. GameCraft's Umbeereon Schwarzbier was awarded a Bronze medal at the 2020 GABF. GameCraft's tasting room menu just before press time included a German-style Pilsner (Becker Pils) and a Kölsch-style ale (Cooldown).



Rad Beer Co's Dylan Mobley Photo Credit: David Mulvihill



The Novak Connection: Some refer to Victor Novak (Figueroa Mountain, Golden Road, TAPS) as the Godfather of Orange County Brewing. His brewing career began 1995 at the original Dock Street Brewery in Philadelphia. He worked under the direction of Nick Funnell, who had followed Lou Farrell and Dock Street's original Brewmaster, Will Kemper (Chuckanut Brewery). Novak was recipient of a legacy of lagers and German style recipes and techniques left behind by Kemper, embraced by Farrell, and ultimately passed on by Funnell, along with a quarry of English and American beer varieties on rotation. "My love and passion for lagers absolutely came from the three original Dock Street Brewers, Will, Lou, and Nick, and their skill and passion," Victor proclaimed in referring to his time at Dock Street.

Returning to California embodying those skills and passion, Novak would continue to pass this knowledge, technique and heritage to his brewers throughout a much-decorated 15 years at TAPS. During his tenure at TAPS, Victor and his Team won 16 GABF medals for world-class European-style lagers. While TAPS is no more, German beer and brewing techniques continue to grow within the brewery tap-lists of brewers formerly under his tutelage. Those alumni are in-turn passing this on to their own brewers and those that follow.

Evan Price: Price worked with Novak for a number of years before his successes as head brewer at Noble Ale Works, and

ultimately opening Green Cheek Beer Co with Brian Rauso. World Beer Cup 2023 would result in Green Cheek coming home with four awards: two gold, one silver, and one bronze. That silver was for a German-style Gose, Guava in Berlin! Last check of Green Cheek tap lists found the following German styles: Bier, a Helles lager, and Chepe's Waterfall, a Vienna-style dark Mexican lager.

Team Bearded Tang: Another Novak/TAPS alumnus, Jonathan Chiusano, left TAPS to open Stanton's Bearded Tang as co-founder and Director of Brewing Operations. Tustin Brewing Company's Jerrod Larsen was recruited as head brewer. Larsen jumped at the opportunity to continue his growth as a brewer under Chiusano's direction, especially in expanding his lager brewing skills. Confirmation of successfully embracing and applying those skills came over the past couple of award years for Team Bearded Tang (which also includes Jordon Friesen and Kyle Coltrain).

Kristal Weizen received GABF 2022 Silver and World Beer Cup 2023 Gold in the German-style Wheat Ale categories at both competitions. Bearded Tang's prior-to-press draft list included Ink'd (German Black Lager) and The OG Hazy (German Hefeweizen).

Steven Torres: Novak alum, Steven Torres, began his professional brewing career at TAPS shortly before Victor would take his leave for Golden Road. After seasoning his craft at TAPS with Kyle Manns,



Team Bearded Tang at this year's World Beer Cup, just after receiving their Gold plaque for Kristal Weizen. Front row: Jerrod Larsen, Jonathan Chiusano, Jordon Friesen. Back row: Cheyenne Rodriguez and Kyle Coltrain  
Photo Credit: David Mulvihill

Jon Chiusano, and David Huls, Torres later followed Victor to Golden Road to continue his training before moving on to partner with Upshift Brewing in El Segundo.

Torres shares the drive and passion embraced by the aforementioned brewers. At press time, Upshift's beer board sported five German-style beers: Kölschwagen Kölsch, Ollek Schwarzbier,

No Way in Helles Lager, Helmet Head Hefeweizen, and Motorad Märzen.

David Mulvihill continues his thirst to experience and promote the best of craft beer. He also provides business-side support (reporting, excise tax, compliance & personnel) to local breweries and brewers guilds. david@socalcraftbeer.com.



Victor Novak and Steven Torres prior to leaving for Figueroa Mountain and Upshift, respectively  
Photo Credit: David Mulvihill

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## BIERGARTEN

# RED LION: OKTOBERFEST ALL YEAR LONG

by Sean Inman

Los Angeles is a true melting pot. In both food and drink especially. Armenian kebabs to Detroit style pizza to Ethiopian cuisine to all manner of taco within driving distance. And drinks are in a Michelada and Tiki phase in breweries and bars.

But one country has not really seen the spotlight for either their cuisine or beverages. That is Germany. One of the historical titans of beer. There is an historic spot in Silver Lake that many Angelenos have probably been to at least once, and should re-visit, the Red Lion Tavern.

The split-level building on Glendale Avenue has been there since 1959, which is quite long in L.A. years. It was first owned by the restaurateurs Ted Mandekic and Edward Pagliano. It started first as an “Olde English” pub until 1963 when it was sold and Britannia was switched into a Teutonic tavern. The space started with a downstairs bar, then a second bar was added, then a parking lot became the outdoor biergarten.

More changes came as 1979 clicked into 1980 when the tavern was closed as new owner Uwe Backen with Hans Loderich as partner began a two-year remodeling effort. Aidas Mattis and his family took

over in 2004 and have been running it since then. Which brings us to today and my first visit in a long time to see what the Red Lion Tavern is like in 2023 and what place it holds in beer in Los Angeles for the future.

You first enter the tavern at street level into a small, cozy and dark room with a bar at the back. To the left is more lowlight and the stairs to the upper bar. Wind your way up past enough German decor to fill two taverns and you will find your way to the upper bar which is like a loud and busy German market square. Here you will find more memorabilia on every wall space and in every nook and cranny. There is also a very large outdoor patio area with picnic tables from top of the mini hill to the bottom as well as a large amount of empty kegs.

When you peruse the beer menu, you will find that the beers are poured not by the pint but by the half liter (16.907 ounces), liter and stein. Surprisingly, you can get a taster flight too from distinguished German breweries such as Bitburger, Spaten, Gaffel, Paulaner, Warsteiner, Hofbrau, Kostritzer and Weihenstephan. These beers have made a journey. You will likely find more Kölsches than you will see IPA. In fact, you will find more apfelwine (cider) than hoppy beer.



*The upstairs patio and its festive decor*

*All Photos Credit: Sean Inman*

It was not Bundesliga Fußball but the NFL on the TV screens when I visited but the cheers are pretty close to the same. The upstairs space quickly filled up as the minutes ticked by in the game and two kegs kicked in quick succession. Regulars began occupying their stools at the bar and a large birthday party started popping as second beers were ordered. While others found quieter corners for a brunch chat. The bartender and waitstaff were hustling through the maze of people and tables with patient and efficient service.

The tavern's food menu is an ode to popular German dishes. This includes potato pancakes, schnitzels and flammkuchen (aka German pizza). And unless you are averse to sausage, the aroma of a landjäger and the beer are a

potent mix. You almost get thirsty for more festbier each time a platter goes by.

It is indeed an old school location but it is still buzzing with energy from all ages. It may not be going viral on an influencers Tik Tok but it has not lasted 60 years on 15 minutes of fame. And that is where the future lies: in friendly people, draft German beer that you just cannot get anywhere else and a biergarten to drink it in. Same as when things first became an Oktoberfest all year round.

*Sean Inman is the force behind the Beer Search Party beer blog. In his non-beer time he reads, watches Premier League football and does not play any musical instruments.*



*The Red Lion's signpost*



*Steins and glasses, part of the decor inside the tavern*



## BREWERY PROFILE

# LOST WINDS FOUND

by Sean McManus



**Brandon Winneker (Head Brewer), Jonathan Plise (Malteurope), and Tim Thralls (Founder/Owner)**

*Photo Courtesy of Lost Winds*

Car enthusiast, woodworker, and beer aficionado Tim Thralls is the founder and owner of Lost Winds Brewing in beautiful San Clemente. Thralls began honing his craft as a high school home-brewer in the early '90s. His brother had recommended a local home brew store, where Tim found his first recipe book. From there he took a hobby and turned it into a new way of life.

Tim formulated recipes on his own for years since there were no craft breweries around at the beginning of his career. Over the long course of 20 years in homebrewing, he traveled the world trying new beers and developing his own style. After living in Scotland for six months, he traveled all over Europe (except Belgium, which he regrets when considering the rich history of Belgian beers). Pale ales were top ticket at the time, but he wanted something for everybody: lagers, IPAs, stouts, Belgian-style ales, and more. His goal was to provide education and change people's minds about craft beer back in the early days when beer drinkers were set in their ways.

Tim was a skilled home brewer, and his passion for beer was all-consuming. But the idea of opening a brewery required capital. He pulled together his and his wife's life savings, then together with another ten friends as investors, he would launch Lost Winds. One of these was the husband of his wife's friend. The gentleman was not

immediately convinced that he should invest as his go to beers were Corona and Guinness. He was not convinced craft beer could be better. Tim challenged him by betting he could make a better stout than Guinness and that's how Lost Wind's San O Stout was born.

Tim and his wife spent ages pondering over the brewery name. As the two sat on a beach while their kids played in the water, they looked at the pier and thought Pier Brewing? No, that was too simple. They thought about other beach-related names. Riviera Brewing? T Street Brewing? And then, Lost Winds Brewing. That was it: Lost Winds Found!

Now began the fun of finding a location, obtaining permits, and hiring a pro brewer. Tim went through building after building with his realtor for six months with the last straw being that his realtor claimed finding the perfect spot: next door to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting room. Tim eventually landed a sweet spot in a perfect warehouse in San Clemente. Now he could apply for his permits, begin acquiring the equipment to commercially brew, and find a head brewer to take his home brews to a professional level.

In the spirit of camaraderie that has always exemplified the spirit of independent craft beer, Tim enlisted help

from an established brewery down the street. Artifex. He asked his neighbors for their recommendation for a pro brewer and heard Brandon Winneker's name for the first time.

On Tim's long drive home from his full-time job that funded much of the project, he gave Brandon a call and set up a time to meet at a restaurant. At the first meeting, Tim and his investor friend sat and waited until they saw a man enter, resume in hand, wearing shorts and a T-shirt that read "Hops is the New Sexy." They thought, this is the man for the job!

Brandon was more than ready for the position. He had completed his bachelor's in microbiology, then trained at UC Davis before interning at Deschutes Brewing, and finally holding multiple positions at Stone for seven years. The three shared beer and conversation before making their way to the future home to Lost Winds. By then they knew Brandon had the job, so why not give him a tour of the empty warehouse. Tim's brand new American-made brewhouse had been set to arrive in a couple of days, but that night, when the three of them opened the garage door, a semi-truck's lights were shining on the new brewhouse in all its sparkling glory. Tim considered this a sign that they were destined to succeed together.

The first few years were magnificent. Lost Winds Brewery was a success. Tim and Brandon were making names for themselves, and customers could not be happier. Then COVID hit. The mandatory shutdowns nearly killed the brewery. Tim and his investors still have not taken a dime home from their profits to this day since everything is invested back into the business. To stay afloat during lockdowns, Lost Winds was able to serve beer to-go. They were able to receive a government paycheck protection program (PPP) loan to keep their employees, and eventually could open outdoor seating, but the damage was done.

Since the end of the lockdowns, people still have not returned to the brewery in the large numbers Lost Winds had before. Many people prefer food with their beer, and Lost Winds relies on food trucks which are sometimes not reliable.

Lost Winds won a gold medal at the most recent Great American Brewing Festival for Huckleberry pH in a sour category. In their words, "the beer is fruity and tart, with a dark pink appearance. This version of our Single pHin Sour series is brewed with huckleberries, lots of them. Crisp tartness and dark berry flavors throughout." When I tried the sour at their last Homies on the Hill event that they hold with their pals at Artifex and Delahunt, I was treated to a sweet aroma and gently sour ale at an easy 5.9% ABV. Tim explains, "it feels amazing and surreal to win Gold in a category with so many entries. I am so lucky to have the best team at Lost Winds, especially Brandon who consistently knocks it out of the park with all our beers!"

In the future, Lost Winds would love to open a satellite tasting room, continue their family-friendly events, and keep making great beer. Tim is a down-to-Earth family man, woodworker who hand-crafted nearly every piece of wood found in the brewery, and a car enthusiast who owns a '55 Chevy Nomad and hosts monthly car meets for all to enjoy.

Do yourself a favor. If you haven't already, take a day trip to scenic San Clemente and find Lost Winds for yourself.



## LA BEAT

## THE CRAC IS CRACK-A-LACKIN'!

by Greg Wellins



Head Brewer Jeff Parker and his wife Ashley

All Photos Credit: Greg Wellins

I live in Arizona, but I'm in SoCal often, and I found myself here a bit more during the pandemic. Ever on the prowl for new breweries since I have been to well over 1,500, I'd been hearing of a new one in Carson (or is it Gardena? – more on that in a bit) called The Crac Brewery. Of course, I needed to check it out, and as I walked in on an April afternoon in '21, the first words I heard the beertender say were, "Hey, Greg Visits Breweries is here." I asked who put him up to that, but it turns out Head Brewer Jeff Parker, behind the bar with his wife Ashley, was a follower of my nascent Instagram page.

Six days later, I was again brewery-hopping with a friend, when for some strange reason (it was April) we started talking about Christmas music, and I ended up playing some holiday tunes that I'd been compiling for my annual Christmas Mix that I give to friends. As luck would have it, we were near the exit for the Crac, and I told my friend that I'd go back if he wanted to try their beers (that I'd found delicious earlier that week). We walked in, and within minutes asked if anyone else in America at that time was a) brewery-hopping and b) listening to Christmas music. Turns out Jeff is a fan of the genre, asked for my phone, and the next thing you know the entire bar was singing carols...in APRIL.

I've been back several times because of this type of whimsy (and of course the beer, including core beers such as the "Savage Crac" IPA and "Noche de los Crac Amber Lager," and rotational beers like the hilariously named "Plumbers Crac" from its puckered up sour series), atypical for your average brewery, but as you're about to find out, The Crac is not your average brewery.

I recently sat down with The Crac's owner Patrick Ruane and Jeff Parker to see how things were going, but first had to get two things out of the way – What's The Crac?, and exactly where is it? The Crac, it turns out, derives from a common Irish term spelled Craic, that can mean several things, but in this context refers to more of an ethos. Ruane and Parker believe that once you leave, you'll say things such as "those were some Crac beers" or "that was a Crac afternoon." Where is the Crac? According to Google Maps, it's in Gardena, though it is in fact part of a sliver of land incorporated by the City of Carson in 1968. Thus, it's officially in Carson, but if you want them to receive your fan mail, you'd best address it to Gardena!

Ruane is an expatriate from Ireland, and lived in Boston for a couple of decades, before settling in Los Angeles and

establishing his construction company. Parker began home brewing in 1989, and in 2009 began a brewery resume that included stints at since-closed South Bay stalwarts Strand Brewing, and The Dudes Brewing. The pair met, by chance, while he was attempting to open his own brewery (Hokulea) not too far from the future site of The Crac. Parker had been experiencing the usual start-up frustrations, while at the same time Ruane had been considering opening his own brewery. Ruane (perhaps not so) randomly stopped by while Parker was working on Hokulea in 2018, saw an opportunity, and persuaded Parker to abandon his plans and consult/brew for him, a serendipitous (or should we say, *beerendipitous*) occasion for sure. Ruane had been eyeing a space for a brewery that, ironically, was a prior construction storage facility, and The Crac began to take shape.

Things didn't go so smoothly from there because, just as they were reaching the finish line to open, the pandemic happened, casting a huge shadow over the Crac's debut. It never had an official Grand Opening. They quietly soft-opened in the Fall of 2020, and slowly but surely began to get beer into the market, and customers through its doors once things improved and restrictions eased. Starting during such a time was incredibly hard, but the Crac persevered and things have greatly improved -- but there is a long way to go. The good news for South Bay beer lovers is they are committed to the long term. Parker also lamented the presumed pandemic-related closure of its neighboring brewery Phantom Carriage as a loss for the South Bay beer community, and on a more practical level for the loss of Crac business that having a nearby brewery brought. No one ever said opening and maintaining a brewery would be easy.



What's the Crac?

Similarly, the aforementioned closure of Strand Brewing hit Jeff hard, as that was the first professional setting in which he honed his brewing chops. But he has carried a living piece of Strand history with him to the Crac. One of its flagship beers, the 24th Street Pale Ale, lives on in a keg that was brewed almost 11 years ago. Every so often, he taps into it and drinks a little of the admittedly not-too-fresh beer as an homage to the beer that he helped brew. Ask Jeff how it's tasting the next time you see him.

When asked about future plans for the Crac, perhaps a Crac II like so many other SoCal breweries, Ruane indicated no such plans, content with continuing the Crac's organic growth at its original Carson location. He did, however, envision a day when, like Starbucks for example, there is a Crac brand, one that encompasses more



Live Music - a Crac staple

Photo Courtesy of The Crac





### Choose your Crac

than just a place to drink beer, but where you can have a “Crac’n” great time among friends. Jeff, on the other hand, eschewed such grandiose visions, content to keep working hard at making some of LA’s finest beers. In other words, they make a pretty good team.

Like many breweries, the Crac looks for other means of getting customers through its doors, including standup comedy and karaoke nights, late-night music with a wide array of styles from jazz to punk, and even holiday happy hours with a



### Dog Friendly

playlist provided by yours truly (more on that below). Parker continually works on ways to improve the core beers, and developing unique beers with distinctive ingredients (Crac beers have been brewed with tequila, and in one case, sea urchin!). He has a self-described freestyle approach to brewing, making beers that others enjoy but in a style that he likes.

Finally, I asked Ruane and Parker what makes them the most satisfied owning a brewery, and practically in unison, they said “seeing a customer for the second

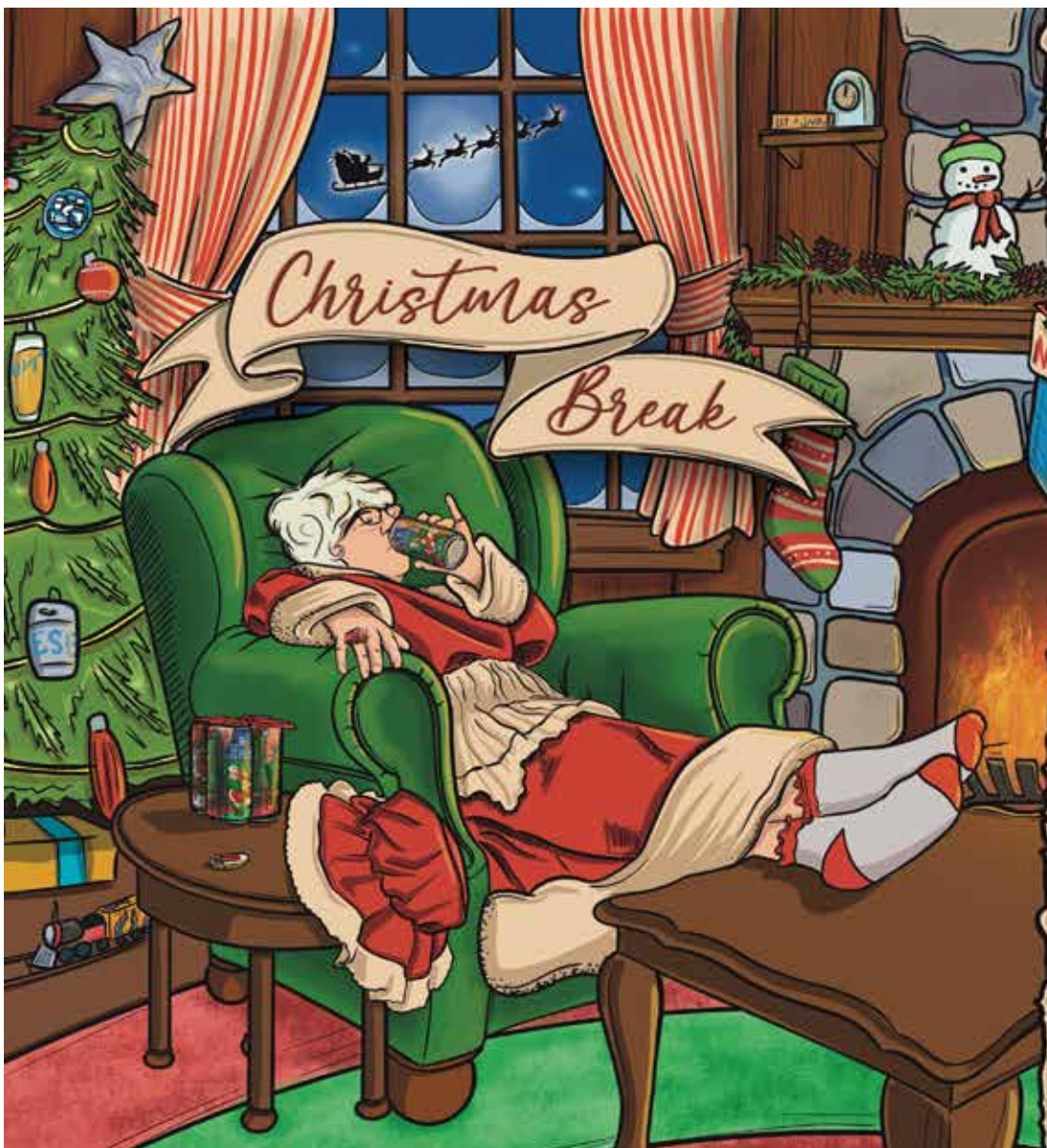
time.” On my multiple visits I’ve seen some of the same people, so I imagine they help bring that sense of satisfaction. Frankly, I go to so many new breweries (currently 1,526 and most likely a few more by the time you read this) that when someone sees me for that second time, they must have done something right the first! Such is the case with the Crac, and in fact, I’ll be there for the *fifth* time when, on Saturday December 16th from 3-6 pm, the Crac will be hosting the second “Greg Visits Breweries Holiday Happy Hour,” where I will be debuting a Crac’n (couldn’t



### Service with a smile

resist) mix of holiday tunes that I have been compiling over the past 22 years. Hope to see many of you there where you too can find out just “What the Crac” is. Oh, and maybe, just maybe, Jeff will share a shot of beer from “the keg” with a lucky patron or two.

*Greg Wellins is a frequent Beer Paper contributor and documents his brewery travels through his Instagram page @gregvisitsbreweries.*



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GOLF & BEER

# COUNTRY CLUB CRAFT BEER?

by Mike Schwalbach

We’ve seen it in countless movies, the stereotypical country club grill & tap room, aka the “19th hole,” where members enjoy a scotch, glass of wine, or cold beer. It’s as though time stopped in 1979.... the bar has three taps serving macro selections: Coors Light, Pacifico, and Stella. Or worse. Budweiser.

That scene all changed in 2019 at Oakmont Country Club, located in Glendale. Oakmont, established in 1922, is a thriving club proud of its highly acclaimed golf course and countless social and family activities, including a spectacular July 4th celebration, a kid’s swim team, and bocce ball evenings throughout the Summer.

In 2019, then club President Derek Patao initiated a Beer Committee at Oakmont to create a better beer experience for the members. As a friend of mine, Derek knew that I enjoyed great craft beer (one of my best friends is Beer Paper’s Daniel Drennon), and thus asked me to be the inaugural chair of the committee. Thinking back, the genesis of the idea was probably Derek listening to me complain about the beer at the club. I gladly accepted the chair position, and the Beer Committee was born.

As a member since the late 1990s, I noticed that Oakmont had any liquor you wanted, name it...a great bourbon, an aged scotch or tequila, as well as a tremendous wine program. But, the beer selection was severely lacking. The original Beer Committee (Derek Patao, Pati Patao, Bob Nicksin, Armando Gonzalez, Brad Nelson, Shahram Parsa, Greg Korn, Keith Kinsel and myself) set out on a mission to serve world class beer from southern California craft breweries.

My outlook at the time was “The members have many different tastes, so let’s offer an array of high quality options for the beer lovers at Oakmont.”

Part of the challenge at a country club is educating the members and expanding their horizons regarding beer. Change is particularly tough when so many have had the same drink after a round of golf for the past 20 years. You have to change with the times, just like allowing denim at a club, and why wouldn’t we change the beer program with so many excellent local craft breweries near us. To have a solid beer program, the details had to be buttoned up. The committee laid out a plan to first shore up the infrastructure: adding more taps, a process to clean the lines, the correct beer glasses, and good signage. Next challenge was which distributors to use. We decided to place eight taps in the Oak Grill and another eight taps at the bar that serves the main dining room, both with non-rotating and rotating selections, providing members with consistency of their favorites and variety with the rotating taps.

We typically don’t go crazy with beer styles, mainly serving Pilsners, Lagers, Ambers, and IPAs. But, Oakmont has occasionally served everything from Witbiers, Saisons, Belgian Browns and Goldens, to barrel-aged Stouts. The result has been an absolute success! Oakmont has now served Beachwood, Green Cheek, Riip, and Craftsman, just to name a few. The committee created beer events including Oktoberfest, a party bus brewery crawl, a beer pong tournament, and a beer trivia night. During the pandemic, Oakmont was even serving growlers for the members that wanted to take their beer home.

In 2023, under the leadership of new chair Bob Nicksin, the committee embarked on the idea of creating its own private label beer. After review, we selected Hop Secret in Monrovia as our partner brewery. In January 2023, Chris Thomas and Ky Pedulla, owners of Hop Secret, visited the Oakmont beer committee to provide some education and beer tasting. Ky remembers that visit, “I came in



unsure of what to expect, seeing as we have never encountered a beer committee like this. However, the atmosphere was welcoming and the committee was genuinely interested and knowledgeable about craft beer.” Oakmont’s first Hop Secret beer on tap was Westy, a crowd pleaser with the members. In selecting a brewery to collaborate with for Oakmont’s private label beer, the committee felt Hop Secret was a great fit; their high quality craft beer and excellent service made the choice easy. We worked with Ky and Chris on the project, including selecting the style of beer and developing the can art. After a few months of discussions, we chose a Mexican-style Lager and decided to serve it on tap as well as in

cans (easier on the golf course). Chris recalls the discussions and details leading to the Oakmont beer: “Bob, Mike, and I discussed several different styles and preferences when debating which beer would end up as “Oakmont 1922” and landed on the Mexican Lager style. We are thrilled with how the beer turned out, and I really enjoyed the organic process.” Regarding the label for the tap handles and cans, Chris suggested, “We have a phenomenal artist, Levi Craig, who does amazing watercolor pieces for Hop Secret. His work is eye grabbing and captivating, so it felt like a natural fit to pair this beer with his colorful artwork.” The committee also discussed a name and landed on “Oakmont 1922” given the founding year of the Club. Since the initial launch, Oakmont 1922 has already become one of the top beer selections. We only see the popularity growing as more members learn about and try the beer. It is a great golf course beer, especially for those that want to enjoy a few during or after a round of golf.

“Oakmont 1922” is the culmination of multiple years building the beer program at Oakmont. The beer program continues to gain momentum and we are all pleased to see members enjoy a delicious beer when that is their drink of choice. We don’t have in-depth knowledge of what other country clubs are serving on tap, but we are proud of how far Oakmont has come along. We believe that Oakmont may be the original local country club serving California craft beer. So, the next time you have a pre-conceived notion of beer at country clubs, you might be pleasantly surprised...at least at Oakmont.

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**EDITORIAL**

# IS THIS LAST CALL FOR BEER PAPER?

by Daniel Drennon

We are all about the beer. And beer news, of course.

For 10 years now, *Beer Paper* has proudly been the leading advocacy publication for independent craft breweries in California: Drink local. Read local.

And read you have! Over the past decade, I've lost count of the number of times I have had the joy of watching batches of beer fans reading our paper with a beautiful pint of California beer in hand. Many of you have expressed to me how much you look forward to each new issue and have based your brewery explorations on our articles, ads or brewery directory.

That has warmed my heart like nothing else. I am sure brewers feel the same emotion when they see you enjoying their superbly crafted brews.

In the aftermath of the awful pandemic that closed down breweries and put the physical *Beer Paper* on hiatus for 18 months, we have seen our advertising steadily decline...from a robust 24 advertisers before COVID to an anemic 8 advertisers as of this issue.

We have stated time and time again: "We are 100% advertiser supported, so please support our advertisers." Part of that request for support is for *YOU*, the beer drinker, to tell the staff of your favorite breweries about your appreciation of our publication. If that is the case, please make it known to the owners, brewers, and beertenders that *Beer Paper* is an added value when you are patronizing their establishment.

When visiting local taprooms myself over the years, many of you have told me that you are at that particular brewery or a beer bar because of *Beer Paper*...but do you tell

*them*? Apparently, these businesses are not consistently recognizing the value of having an advocacy paper that is beloved by our shared customers: You, the best beer drinkers and fans in the world.

Given the drop in advertising, this is possibly our last issue, concluding a memorable 10-year run. That would break my heart. I suspect it would break a lot of your hearts too.

If so, please take the time to share your affinity for *Beer Paper* with your favorite brewery or beer bar. We can't support them if they don't support us. It's that simple.

We are going to take a couple of months off to reassess. We will miss seeing you paging through our beeriodical on the bar in front of you. We do not know what the future will hold for *Beer Paper*, but we will keep you posted on social media.

At Stereo Brewing's recent 7th Anniversary party, I spotted a gentleman reading the paper in the middle of a crowded taproom. I stopped by and thanked him for reading the paper. He said, "I had never heard of Stereo until I read your cover story on [owner/brewmaster] Rick Smets. I came here, fell in love with the place, met Rick and now I'm a regular here. So, thanks. I read the paper every single month."

It made our last 10 years of commitment to independent California craft beer worth it. I thanked him.

And I thank each of you.

Happy Holidays, and I hope we see you — and you see and read us — in the new year,

Daniel Drennon  
Publisher



Daniel Drennon of Beer Paper

Photo Credit: Tomm Carroll





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