
THE BREWPUB: A BEERLY LEGAL CONCEPT

BY BRIAN MENCHER WITH MICHELLE MCKNIFF

Beer. It's one of the most popular alcoholic beverages in the United States, and perhaps the world. As early as the 1500s, Virginia colonists were harvesting corn to brew beer, and by the 17th century, the English were exporting their homemade beers to America. Well before the days of the major beer manufacturers in the United States, everyday citizens were developing their craft for making home-brewed beers. Those that excelled at the craft moved the operation from their basements to buildings where they could brew and also serve their hand-crafted beers to the public.

While today the brewpub seems like a normal part of the commercial landscape, its existence in America faced numerous setbacks; first Prohibition, and then tied-house legislation. Prohibition, as provided for by the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920, prohibited the manufacture, sale, or transportation of beer (as well as all "intoxicating liquors") within the country. Not until December 5, 1933, was Prohibition repealed by the 21st Amendment, granting the states authority to regulate alcoholic beverages. But the states, including California, soon passed tied-house legislation, preventing the combined ownership of the manufacturing, distribution, and retail sectors of the alcoholic beverage industry by one company. A brewpub, being a manufacturer and retailer all in one, was prohibited by law.

BERKELEY MAYOR TOM BATES AND THE BREWPUB MOVEMENT

American interest in hand-crafted beers was stirred during the Cold War years when many young men and women were stationed at military bases in Germany. Among them in the 1960s was Tom Bates, now Mayor of Berkeley, who also became acquainted with the pleasures of hand-crafted beers. On returning to Berkeley, he had the unhappy realization that beer here was no match for the delicious microbrews available in Europe. In trying to understand why, he noted how the then-existing oligopoly of beer manufacturers in the United States (such as mega-producers Anheuser-Busch, Miller, Heileman, Stroh, Coors, and Pabst), along with the tied-house legislation preventing vertical ownership, stifled small brewers from getting their products to the masses.

In 1976, Tom Bates was elected to the California State Assembly, and by 1982, he and Assemblyman Don Sebastiani (yes, of Sebastiani winemakers) had sponsored a bill providing for an exception to tied-house laws. The industry's major beer manufacturers, which controlled 92 percent of U.S. beer production, initially opposed the bill. Once Bates explained that the bill's purpose was only to provide customers with a central location to purchase and enjoy home-brewed or craft beer on the premises rather than to



Christian Kazakoff starts the mash at Triple Rock

compete with them in mass distribution, manufacturers grudgingly backed off.

On September 13, 1982, Governor George Deukmejian approved Assembly Bill 3610, removing the barrier prohibiting a single owner from manufacturing beer and selling it retail. California was the first state to enact such enabling legislation, leading the rest of the country to soon follow suit. The new legislation, along with a pervasive culture of home-brewing, paved the way for the nationwide proliferation of brewpubs.

FOUNDER'S TRAIL

If Mayor Bates can find the time, he might write a guidebook to the first brewpubs in California made possible by the legislation he worked to create. On that "Founder's Trail" would be Triple Rock Brewery, a Berkeley establishment that claims to be the third brewpub to open in the United States after passage of the legislation. Beer lovers around Berkeley in the early 1980s might remember that Triple Rock started out with the name Roaring Rock. The change of name came about after the brewery learned they might face a trademark infringement suit due to potential confusion with Rolling Rock, a pale lager produced by Latrobe Brewing of Pennsylvania.

Triple Rock's head brewer, Christian Kazakoff, describes how beer-making begins by pouring grain into a vat of hot water to create what they call the mash, starting a process in which enzymes convert the grain's starches to sugars. Kazakoff explains that the process essentially "tricks the grain into thinking it needs to sprout and grow." Following this conversion, the grains are rinsed with cold water to separate the sugars, a process known as sparging. At this point, the grain is discarded and donated to local cattle and dairy farms, and the remaining liquid, called wort, is boiled for an hour. Hops, the essential ingredient for lending flavor and texture to beer, is then added. (Most brewers we interviewed, including Kazakoff, agreed that the best domestic hops come from the

Pacific Northwest, specifically Washington State.) Once cooled, the liquid is relocated to a fermenter and yeast is added—a step called “pitching the yeast.” Approximately one week after the yeast is added, it begins to convert the sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide. This is fermentation, the final stage, and it continues for up to two more weeks, at the end of which you have beer that is ready to drink.

When in production, Triple Rock makes roughly 217 gallons of beer daily. Patrons can enjoy Kazakoff’s efforts directly at the brewery or at other Berkeley establishments, such as Jupiter and Saul’s, but due to Triple Rock’s relatively small production, it generally does not sell its product to other retailers.

By contrast, Pyramid Alehouse, a much larger Berkeley establishment, not only serves its hand-crafted beers for consumption on the premises but also has a large retail market. Pyramid can produce 6,000 cases of beer a week, plus an additional 500 kegs. With such large production, quality control is crucial. Pyramid’s head brewer, Simon Pesch, focuses on consistency using strict measurements and release parameters to calculate the flavor, bitterness, sweetness, and alcohol content of each beer. He can measure the temperature of his cellar to one-tenth of a degree. Pyramid works with very modern equipment, though still prides itself in producing artisan beers.

At Buffalo Bills in Hayward, new owner Geoff Harris and brewer John Carbone make 310 gallons of beer three to four times a week. They use less modern machinery in the beer-making process than does Pyramid, but the science for brewing high-quality beers remains the same. Temperatures, quality of ingredients, brewing techniques, and constant adjustments along the way rule the day.

THE RESURGENCE OF ARTISAN BEER

The interest in artisan beer and the craft of brewing continues to increase as breweries try to meet the tastes of sophisticated enthusiasts, many of whom are home brewers themselves. The appeal of artisan beer lies in the nature of how it is made and served. Unlike wine, with its sophisticated aura, beer is offered in a relaxed setting and is less expensive. Its lower alcohol content also allows the beer drinker to enjoy more of it. Many craft beer enthusiasts enjoy the fact that they can drink the freshly made beers right at the source. This creates a real connection between the beer drinker and brewer, which can be very inspiring to the brewer. Even craft brews bottled in large volume, such as Pyramid’s production, are given a shelf life of only three months, since the brewer wants the drinker to experience freshness similar to what they would find right at the brewpub.

It is quite common for aficionados of hand-crafted beer to try their hands in home brewing. East Bay resident Eric Dreman, who claims to have been a foodie all his life, started brewing beer at the age of 18 (but didn’t start drinking it until he was 21, of course). An avid bread-maker, Dreman recalls driving through Hopland (which, yes, is named for the hops it produced) in 1983 on his move from Portland, Oregon, to Mill Valley, California. Upon seeing a sign that read “handmade brews,” he pulled off the high-

way to investigate. What he didn’t know at the time was that he was about to descend on the first brewpub in America, the Mendocino Brewing Company. He was impressed by the richness of the red ales, for which Mendocino is famous, and by the similarities between bread-making and brewing, namely the use of yeast and grain. On deciding to learn the craft of making beer at home, he visited the Oak Barrel in Berkeley, where he was able to purchase all the necessary equipment.

Dreman says that brewers working at brewpubs are just home brewers that have moved to working at a commercial level. Brewmasters tend to be people who are curious about food, and often, as we learned from the three brewmasters mentioned above, few brewmasters ever start with the intention of making beer for a living. Triple Rock brewer Christian Kazakoff and assistant brewer Bradley Robins both started out in restaurant kitchens. Intrigued by the craft of making beer, Kazakoff asked the head brewer to teach him the trade. He was instructed to try his hand at home brewing first to determine whether he wanted to pursue it as a career. John Carbone, of Buffalo Bills, started as a bartender before delving into the brewing side. Once he gained some expertise as a home brewer, he applied for the head brewer position. Ten years later, he is still doing what he loves. Simon Pesch, of Pyramid, began his career in the wine industry fermenting grapes rather than



John Carbone at Buffalo Bills

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grain. He says he was drawn to brewing because beer can be brewed at any time of year and it does not involve the uncertainty and risk of the autumn grape harvest.

LOCAL SIGNATURE CRAFT BREWING

Most beer crafters hone their skills by re-creating a few brews all year round, but they are compelled to create local signature beers—beers that are seasonal or otherwise unique—to put their brewpubs on the map. At Buffalo Bills, for example, the infamous Tasmanian Devil offers a distinct malt character—this is a brew that appears as the subject of beer blogs throughout the country. Come wintertime, brewpubs pour their seasonal ales, like Buffalo Bills' Pumpkin and the Blue Christmas. They brew nearly 350 gallons of each during the season.

Triple Rock's flagship brew, Red Rock Pale Ale, is its most popular. According to Triple Rock's website, the brew is an amber ale with a robust hop character, malty balance, and a slight roasty aftertaste. Their Stonehenge Stout is kept on nitrogen. According to Kazakoff, a beer on nitrogen provides a "real ale" taste. On Thursday evenings they serve their popular Monkey-Head Brew, a high-alcohol beer meant to be shared among friends.

While signature beers are usually crowd-pleasers, brews that are recognized by industry critics also help a brewpub make a name for itself. Pyramid was recently awarded first place in the Great American Beer Festival for the best wheat beer, and won two medals (one in the Great American Beer Festival and one at the World Beer Cup) for their Hefe Weizens, wheat beers that tend to be great introductions into the craft beer world for new tasters.

While home brewing is an ancient art, the legalization of the brewpub brought craft beers to downtowns and communities throughout the country. In fact, brewpubs are so commonplace that it can be hard to believe that such establishments could have been prohibited for 50 years following Prohibition. Thanks to a burgeoning home brewing community and the leadership of Mayor Tom Bates (and others), the brewpub is a legal business concept. So next time you see Mayor Bates be sure to tip your hat and offer to buy him an artisan beer from your local brewpub. ☘

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Buffalo Bills

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Photo by Amanda Dew Manning

