

NOTABLE EDIBLES

BALLAST POINT BREWERY GETS SPIRITED

In the decade since Yuseff Cherney joined Ballast Point Brewing Company as its head brewer, the brewery has expanded from a fledgling operation in the back of a home brew supply store to a second location in Scripps Ranch. Here, Cherney and his crew produce 10,000 barrels a year of Ballast Point's five signature and many other special, nautically named craft beers.

As if keeping local beer aficionados, shops and bars supplied with beer didn't keep him busy enough, Yuseff started attending classes and conferences on distilling spirits, traveling to visit other micro-distilleries within breweries, including San Francisco's Anchor Steam Distilling. After a joint trip to tour Kentucky's Bourbon County, he was able to convince Ballast Point's owner, Jack White, to give him the go-ahead and Ballast Point Spirits, San Diego's first licensed distillery since Prohibition, was born late last year.

The brewery's expansion from beer to spirits seems like a pretty natural progression. After all, whiskey starts with a wash, a sugary liquid of water-steeped mashed grains—and a brewery, of course, has plenty of malted barley on hand. The wash is fermented with the brewery's yeast strain, then distilled and aged. The number of times the liquid is distilled affects its alcohol content and the variety. Scotch is usually distilled twice; Irish whiskey, three times.

Ballast Point's distillery, housed in what was once their employee break room in a small fenced-off corner of the Old Grove Road brewery, is no more than a few racks of barrels and the essential distilling equipment: a fermenter and a large half-pot, half-column still, which Cherney built himself, with help from a friend.

Yuseff's favorite spirit is bourbon, but it and other whiskeys take a little more advanced distilling experience so he decided to start with rum, inspired by San Diego's sunny, sailing-friendly climate. Made by fermenting organic evaporated cane sugar, Ballast Point's rums are dubbed 3 Sheets and come as light (or white) rum or aged rum. Like true bourbons, the aged rum is placed in heavily charred, new American oak casks that give the rum a smooth, smoky flavor that does taste remarkably like whiskey.

But the first Ballast Point spirit to hit shelves will be the Old Grove Gin, which should be in a number of local li-



quor stores by the end of June 2009. It starts with a neutral grain alcohol that's vaporized in the still. The rising vapors glean essential oils from dried herbs and other botanicals that give the spirits its distinct flavor. The Old Grove Gin's mix of 11 botanicals includes coriander seeds, sourced from Indio, California, and rose petals.

The name of Ballast Point's whiskey is a nod to what happens when a spirit ages in a barrel and some of the alcohol is lost due to evaporation. This portion is known as the Angel's Share, so naturally, what's left in the cask is the Devil's Share. Yuseff plans to do a couple of different Devil's Share bottlings, including bourbon and an Irish-style whiskey, which will each age at least a year and be released, as he says, "when it tastes good."

For now, the Ballast Point crew distills a few handcrafted batches of spirits in between tending to their brewery duties, but they hope that the distillery will take off and be appreciated by local imbibers and bars that make artisan cocktails with small-batch spirits. Craft distilling is at an exciting, all-things-are-possible stage. There are no strict rules to follow or specific styles to be bound to. And at Ballast Point, like everything that's good, it started with beer.

—Candice Woo



Yuseff Cherney

VIVA POPS COMES TO NORMAL HEIGHTS

If you've strolled through the Little Italy farmers' market on a Saturday, chances are you've noticed Lisa Altmann. Standing behind her pristine white Viva Pops pushcart, Lisa is the one with a constant smile, handing out handmade popsicles to eager market-goers. Her pops, which are inspired by Mexican *paletas*, come in a dizzying array of colors and a stunning combination of flavors—think Lavender Lemonade, Strawberry Basil and Cucumber Chili. "I've always been attracted to more creative flavors," Lisa explains.

Altmann sources much of her fruit from local growers, including citrus and herbs from Schaner Farms and strawberries from Kawano Farms. Her pop flavors change based on what is available each season; this summer, Lisa is excited to work with stone fruit like cherries and nectarines.

But the big Viva Pops news this summer is not the new flavors. It's Viva Pops' new home. Spurred by Lisa's search for a larger kitchen, Viva Pops has moved into a storefront on Adams Avenue. Keeping with Viva Pop's playful design, the store is awash in what Lisa calls "tropical fun colors that reflect the colors of the pops." Behind the colorful storefront, a larger kitchen helps Lisa keep up with a growing demand for her pops.

For all you Little Italy market-goers, don't worry—the festive Viva Pops cart will continue to be at the market. Lisa also brings her Viva Pops cart to the Solana Beach market, and also caters to special events and parties. But if you find yourself looking for some thirst-



Viva Pops
3330 Adams Ave.
Normal Heights
ilovevivapops.com

quenching relief from the heat this summer and can't wait until a weekend market, head on over to the Normal Heights storefront. Lisa promises it will be the same friendly experience she offers at the market: "Come by, say hi, grab a pop and we'll talk a little." Then you'll continue on your way, but not without pausing to relish that delightful explosion of local flavor.

— Lauren Duffy

NEW ROOTS COMMUNITY FARM

The city-owned plot of land at 54th and Chollas Boulevard sat unused and undeveloped for years, hardly warranting much thought or attention. But several months ago, signs of life slowly started to emerge. Debris was cleared. A water meter went in. A fence was erected, the soil was tilled and compost brought in. This summer, the plot of land will complete its transformation, debuting as City Heights' first fully operational urban farm.

The New Roots Community Farm has been a long time in the making. Its seeds were sowed more than two years ago, when the nonprofit International Rescue Committee found itself with a surplus of allocated grant money and a desire to put it to good use. The IRC, a refugee resettlement agency with an office in San Diego, asked a group of Somali Bantu refugees living in City Heights how the money could best be put to use. Help us find land on which to grow food, they replied.

Many of the refugees that the IRC works with are farmers by tradition. Transplanted to a city setting, there is little opportunity for them to put their skills and knowledge to use. So the IRC decided to put the money toward securing land that was both within walking distance of the refugee families, and large enough to allow experienced farmers to apply their skills.

It took two years and far more money than the original grant for the IRC to legally transform the plot at 54th and Chollas into an urban farm. But they now hold a three-year use occupancy permit, which grants them permission to use city land, and a site development permit that allows them to install a water meter, lay irrigation, put up a fence and a shed to store farm tools.

When I spoke to Amy Lint, a community development specialist at the IRC who has helped move the process along, she was excited to announce that "we are pretty much all systems go at this point." While much work was still to be done when we spoke in late April, the list of plot users had been finalized and Amy expected the first plot to be tilled not far in the future. "We are looking at the grand opening in mid-July," she predicted.

When community members finally gain access to their 30- by 20-foot plots, the IRC's work will not be done. "We are in conversations with the city about simplifying the process," Amy explains of the two years it took them to get the permits they needed. Their hope is to make the permitting easier for any other urban farms that might follow. They are also working to develop an educational component to the farm. Amy hopes that free educational sessions will allow the urban farmers to share their skills with the community. Many of the urban farmers will also have the opportunity to sell excess produce through the City Heights Farmers' Market's backyard growers program.

The New Roots Farm will certainly fill a need in the City Heights community, especially for those families who will finally be able to grow their own food. But Amy hopes the New Roots Farm will serve a greater purpose as well: to "inspire people in general in the community" to take up growing food themselves. Many people have the space in their own yards, she suggests. And the farm is a natural way to gather people around a common interest. Amy reminds me that no matter what our background or culture, food is an interest we all share.

—Lauren Duffy