

Craft Beer Tap Handles from the CSUSM Brewchive® Collection

Brightly-colored figurative tap handles offer marketing opportunity and aid in recognition of a particular brewery or beer. In bars and restaurants serving from a variety of competing breweries, tap handles are loaned by the brewery to advertise their brews to consumers. As Oliver Grey in *All About Beer Magazine*, writes, tap handles are “the only real chance a brewery has to do any marketing on [non-brewery] premise.”¹

Technological developments in shipping and storing, as well as the introduction of CO₂ to push beer through tap lines, have driven corresponding innovations in tap handle design while filling the original purpose to aid dispensing beer. The earliest bungs (simple wooden plugs that were pulled from a keg’s hole to gravity-feed beer) developed into the early 20th century unadorned ‘ball knob’ tap handles, into the designs seen today.

Factors which have influenced tap handle design are:

- post-Prohibition legislation requiring beer handles branding to prevent consumer fraud,
- confusion about which beer is on which tap,
- brewery identity in non-exclusive locations,
- durability,
- ease in use of the dispensing system, and
- private off-site consumption from kegs.

The designs and brands have inspired tap handle collector clubs and an online private museum (e.g., Amazing Tap Handles, which also has a blog.)

This exhibit draws from the collection of San Diego craft brewery tap handles held in the Brewchive® and obtained through donation and purchase. To collect tap handles, please do so ethically through purchase, or when deliberately discarded by a brewery, as the cost to replace these custom items impacts our local breweries.

Have a local breweriana to donate? Please contact jdownie@csusm.edu

¹ “Pour Influence : How Tap Handles Affect Drinkers’ Decisions” (2015) <https://allaboutbeer.net/article/pour-influence-tap-handles/>