

West Coaster

DECEMBER 2019 | SAN DIEGO BEVERAGE NEWS |



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CONTENTS

- 7 SAN DIEGO COUNTY WINERIES REPORT
- 8-13 SAN DIEGO BEVERAGE BRIEFS
- 16-17 SAN DIEGO BEER EVENTS
- 18-19 PROHIBITCHIN': HOLLY DONER OF ALESMITH
- 22-23 PLATES & PINTS: CHEESE BISCUITS
- 25-28 BEER IN THE HEADLIGHTS: LESSONS FROM OKTOBERFEST
- 30-32 SD DISTILLERS GUILD EVENT RECAP
- 36-37 READERS' POLL 20 IN '20



ON THE COVER / OPPOSITE PAGE:

A small batch collaboration between Seven Caves Spirits and Paru Tea Bar released in November. More info on page 8. Photo by Diana Sciacca.

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SD WINE INDUSTRY

IMPACT REPORT

Lowell Jooste of LJ Crafted Wines. Photo by Kristina Yamamoto.

A new report released by the San Diego County Vintners Association in mid-November details the industry's impact for the year 2018. What follows is the report's executive summary, compiled by independent data analyst Vince Vasquez. To read the full report, visit <http://bit.ly/sdwineryreport>.

Over the last few years, wineries in San Diego County have noticeably expanded their presence in the regional economy, fostering job growth, tax revenue, and property improvements throughout the county. An in-depth economic data analysis can highlight the important economic opportunities and policy choices presented by this unique agricultural sector. Using survey data, economic modeling software, and public datasets, we conducted an economic analysis of the San Diego County wine industry, building upon our prior research in this sector.

OVERALL, THE STUDY FOUND THAT:

- The economic impact of San Diego County wineries was \$58.6 million in 2018.
- In 2018, San Diego County wineries generated \$41,059,126 million in gross sales, a 57.1% increase over 2017 sales (\$26.1 million) and a 71.9% increase from 2016 sales (\$23.8 million).
- San Diego County has maintained steady interest and growth in new wineries since 2012. The data reveals this is reflective of a confluence of existing wineries adding new satellite tastings rooms in the region, and new winery owners establishing their business operations.
- Today, there are 142 active and planned wineries in San Diego County.
- In 2018, San Diego County growers harvested 3,284 tons of wine grapes with a production value of \$4,591,032. In all, 1,642 acres of wine grapes were harvested, an amount that is more than 50% higher than the acre tally from 2016 (930) and more than 1,000 acres from just ten years ago.
- Varietal diversity continues to expand in San Diego County – our survey found that more than 62 varietals are grown in the region, a higher tally than found in prior survey years (45 in 2017 and 2016). As seen in prior surveys, the top five varietals grown, cultivated and/or sold in the region in 2018 were Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Merlot, Sangiovese and Zinfandel.
- The steady rise in average industry wages in San Diego County hit a new record in Quarter 1 2019, with \$48,724 as the opening average wage for 2019. It is our view that the significant rise in average wages since 2016 is a combination of both rising wages for a growing number of new industry jobs, as well as more boutique winery owners, who previously operated without paying themselves a wage, now paying themselves a wage.
- More than six out of ten (64%) wineries stated that Millennials are a growing portion of their clientele. Most survey participants indicated that Millennials also comprised 20-30% of their sales in 2018.
- Overall, there were 611.7 San Diego-based wine industry jobs in 2018, a 9.7% increase over the 2017 total (557.2) and 17.8% higher than the 2016 total (519).



Beverage Briefs

TapShack's new kombucha production space in Barrio Logan.



Company co-founder Amanda Matson hugs TapShack's dry storage container.

Beverage Briefs

⇒ TAPSHACK EXPANDS

Local kombucha maker TapShack started brewing commercially in November 2018 in their 350 square foot Pacific Beach location. They've since maxed out that area, and over the summer decided to find a larger place to brew.

The new spot in Barrio Logan has about 4,000 square feet of brewing space, a few offices, and a second story that will be built out as a lab to do all of the testing in house. There will be no tasting room at this location so that owners Amanda Matson and Chris Bourgeois can focus on launching their wholesale program. Their goal is to brew enough kombucha to expand TapShack into more regions of San Diego and eventually statewide.

Meanwhile, you can visit their original locale (which just turned two in November) at 2232 Sunset Cliffs in Ocean Beach.

⇒ LOST CAUSE PLOTS 2020

One of the busiest bees in San Diego's mead industry is certainly Lost Cause Meadery. Their "Coveters Club" bottle program sold out 150 memberships quickly after release in late November, a second anniversary party is planned for December 7, and they're also making strides to move production right next door to Deft Brewing in Bay Park. The original Miralani Makers tasting room will remain, sharing space with Serpentine Cider and Good Seed Food Company.

⇒ SEVEN CAVES & PARU TEA BAR

Miramar-based Seven Caves Spirits (7C) teamed up with Point Loma's Paru Tea Bar on a special jasmine tea rum, released last month in 750mL bottles.

The jasmine tea rum features an in-house distilled high ester white rum created specifically for the inclusion of Paru Tea Bar's "Jasmine Wild" tea, a blend of wild grown green tea from Ha Giang and fresh jasmine blossoms from Ha Noi, Vietnam, picked at peak ripeness. The tea was hand-blended by Paru Tea Bar owner Amy Truong.

"The resulting product reminds you instantly of the subtle and delicate flavors of the best jasmine tea," Seven Caves Spirits owner and distiller Geoff Longenecker said. "Fragrant and sweet, but with a touch of the tea's natural bitterness—this is one of my favorite bottles I've ever released at 7C."

7C and Paru Tea Bar will also be hosting a tea pairing and rum tasting at the distillery to celebrate the "Exploratory Series" Jasmine Tea Rum on a future date to be announced.

⇒ NOVO BRAZIL'S NEW LOCATION

Chula Vista's Novo Brazil Brewing recently implemented a packaging rebrand, the mission of which was three-fold. The Brazilian ownership team wanted to broaden its concept into a fermented-beverage operation, while incorporating and celebrating their homeland's native flavors, and showing off the colorful culture and "happiness" of their homeland. The vibrant cans containing the company's assorted beers, hard seltzers and kombuchas were a nice first step, but the vehicle best driving home Novo Brazil's identity is its newly soft-opened brewpub at the Otay Ranch Town Center.

Located at 2015 Birch Toad, Suite 1017, the combination bar, restaurant and brewery, comes in at a whopping 12,000 square feet. From an exterior sporting a black-and-white wave pattern mimicking the walkways of Copa Cabana beach to an interior sporting a wavy west wall and similarly curvy bar (one of the longest in South Bay if not the entire county), plus furniture fashioned from Brazilian wood, murals from Brazilian artists depicting Rio de Janeiro and Pelé, it is an authentic interpretation and presentation of the owners' heritage.

But it isn't all about them. Just as important, they say, is conveying the roots they've laid down in Southern California and recognizing the influence of Chula Vista's Hispanic population. "It's important to us that people know Novo Brazil is not imported beer," says Novo Brazil co-founder and president, Tiago Carneiro. "We are an American company with Brazilian soul."

A five-barrel brewhouse and accompanying fermentation tanks occupy the south end of the venue. Brewer José Felipe Carneiro and company have lofty aspirations where that equipment is involved. They intend to brew more than 300 different beers at the brewpub in the first year alone, with over 50 of them being different hazy IPAs. They will need a great deal of variety to fill their 60 taps, roughly 40 of which will dispense beer with the rest designated for kombucha and seltzer. Additionally, Novo Brazil has applied for a distilling license at the brewpub in hopes of producing canned cocktails.

⇒ NINKASI BREWS AT SECOND CHANCE

Ninkasi Brewing's founding brewer Jamie Floyd visited San Diego for Beer Week last month, staying at Humphreys and stopping by spots like Hamilton's, South Park Brewing, Eppig Waterfront, OB Noodle House, and Bali Hai. Floyd and company also participated in Fishing with the Brewers at Fathom Bistro Bait & Tackle (Floyd's sixth year attending). Another big reason for the Oregonians to grace America's Finest City was a brew day with Second Chance (SC), the planning for which started last year.

With about an inch to spare, Lost Cause
moves this tank into Bay Park.





Marty Mendiola, Jamie Floyd, and Marta Swanson pour in hops at Second Chance

Second Chance tasting room lead Marta Swanson approached Floyd at the Maui Beer Fest about collab'ing with SC brewmaster Marty Mendiola. Floyd and Mendiola had bumped into each other at conferences for more than a decade, but had never brewed together before. Swanson saw an opportunity for two industry veterans to team up and brew a powerhouse IPA, and earlier this year Marty brewed a triple IPA with Jamie while in the area working on hop selection. A Ninkasi employee even delivered a finished growler of that beer to Marta, who was staying in a Portland hotel a few hours away.

The beer brewed last month in Carmel Mountain Ranch was basically the same recipe, a 10.2% ABV triple IPA packed with Mosaic and Cashmere hops, plus some Simcoe. Canning of "Blank Slate" took place in late November.

➡ ALTA BREWING AND BARREL HARBOR CLOSE

In the summer of 2017, John Bull opened the doors to Alta Brewing in Barrio Logan. It was the community's second brewery, following in the footsteps of Border X Brewing, and later joined by Thorn Brewing and the Attitude Brewing brewpub (in addition to Iron Fist's satellite tasting room). Over the past two-plus years, the business has had some ups and downs. When original head brewer Brett Stampf departed Alta last summer, it temporarily closed, opening again several weeks later. Today, it was confirmed that Alta will shutter again at the end of the month, but this time it will be permanent.

"As of November 30, Alta Brewing will be closing. The business has been challenging [as we] try to recover after the original partnership failed," says Bull. "There has been a lot of hard work and effort by the staff to keep the business running. Unfortunately, without a fairly large influx of capital, the business has little to no chance of succeeding. Continuing operations would only compound that."

In 2016, Vista-based Barrel Harbor Brewing opened a joint-venture tasting room in Miramar with a table-top gaming enterprise called At Ease Games. That venture hobbled along unsuccessfully for two-and-a-half years before closing in March. Owner Tim St. Martin pulled out in an effort to save his overall business, but that step wasn't enough. In late October, St. Martin emailed Barrel Harbor's newsletter subscribers to inform them of his business' abrupt closure following suspension of its license by the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC).

"After many months of trying to keep things afloat, the debt load from the Miramar tasting room was just too much for me to bear on my own," said St. Martin. "The Vista tasting room has not been generating enough revenue to cover its load and make payments on the debt from opening and operating Miramar at a loss for 2.5 years."

St. Martin says Barrel Harbor's closure is "indefinite." Back taxes incited the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration to request the ABC suspend Barrel Harbor's license. St. Martin says that if he is able to get caught up with moneys owed to the State, he can reopen, but admits the chances of that are slim given the fact he is no longer able to generate revenue through the business.

Barrel Harbor has historically struggled from a financial standpoint. In 2018, St. Martin sought investors through an online crowdfunding campaign with a goal of raising \$100,000 to \$250,000. That effort was unsuccessful. This July, he initiated another crowdfunding campaign hoping to raise \$50,000. It also failed, garnering just \$3,832. "I am still trying to work some magic, but for now I fear that this may be farewell," said St. Martin. "I have said this before and it means even more now, 'please send me an angel.'" ✨



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LOCAL *events*

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December 3 – Tuesday

- ▶ OG Yoga @ Thorn Brewing Barrio Logan

December 4 – Wednesday

- ▶ Winter Wonderland Succulent and Sip Workshop @ 13 Point Brewing

December 5 – Thursday

- ▶ Two Scientists Walk Into a Bar @ 25 Locations

December 6 – Friday

- ▶ 23rd Annual Strong Ale Fest (Day 1) @ Pizza Port Carlsbad
- ▶ Enchilada & Beer Flight w/ Good Seed Food Co @ Savagewood Brewing
- ▶ Hops on the Harbor Beer Pairing Dinner Cruise w/ AleSmith Brewing

December 7 – Saturday

- ▶ 23rd Annual Strong Ale Fest (Day 2) @ Pizza Port Carlsbad
- ▶ 12 Bell's of Christmas w/ Bell's Brewery @ Hamilton's Tavern
- ▶ Intro to Homebrewing Classes @ The Homebrewer

December 8 – Sunday

- ▶ 48th Annual SD Bay Parade of Lights @ Fathom Bistro
- ▶ Truck Pull Fundraiser @ AleSmith Brewing

December 9 – Monday

- ▶ Suds & Science: Studying Heart Disease in Men and Women w/ RH Fleet @ Stone Liberty Station

December 13 – Friday

- ▶ Try The Pine IPA Release @ Culture Brewing Tasting Rooms
- ▶ Hops on the Harbor Beer Pairing Dinner Cruise w/ AleSmith Brewing

December 14 – Saturday

- ▶ Second Saturday w/ AleSmith, Thunderhawk & Amplified @ Hamilton's Tavern
- ▶ Holiday Beer Pairing w/ Doughside Donuts @ Kilowatt Oceanside
- ▶ Casey Hensley Blues @ Ebullition Brew Works
- ▶ Tap House Grand Opening @ Guadalupe Brewery

- ▶ 5th Annual Ales N' Rails Fundraiser @ SD Model Railroad Museum

December 15 – Tuesday

- ▶ 48th Annual SD Bay Parade of Lights @ Fathom Bistro
- ▶ Beer Mug Painting Class @ Kilowatt Ocean Beach

December 17 – Tuesday

- ▶ Intro to Homebrewing Classes @ The Homebrewer

December 19 – Thursday

- ▶ Santa's Secret Stash @ Hamilton's Tavern
- ▶ Jenga Tournament @ Alpine Beer Company

December 20 – Friday

- ▶ Hops on the Harbor Beer Pairing Dinner Cruise w/ AleSmith Brewing

December 21 – Saturday

- ▶ Seize the Moment to Be Creative @ Second Chance North Park
- ▶ Holiday Market @ Societe Brewing Co.

December 25 – Wednesday

- ▶ Christmas Celebration (Open at 5 p.m.) @ Hamilton's Tavern

December 27 – Friday

- ▶ Food & Wine Pairing w/ Good Seed Food Co @ Pamo Winery
- ▶ Hops on the Harbor Beer Pairing Dinner Cruise w/ AleSmith Brewing

December 28 – Saturday

- ▶ Walkabout: Coffee Theme @ Miralani Makers District

December 31 – Tuesday

- ▶ Hop Drop NYE @ AleSmith Brewing
- ▶ NYE Party @ 32 North Brewing Co.

JANUARY 2020

January 7 – Tuesday

- ▶ OG Yoga @ Thorn Brewing Barrio Logan

January 17 – Friday

- ▶ Jenga Tournament @ Alpine Beer Company

January 18 - Saturday

- ▷ 3rd Anniversary Celebrations @ Burgeon Beer Company

January 24 - Friday

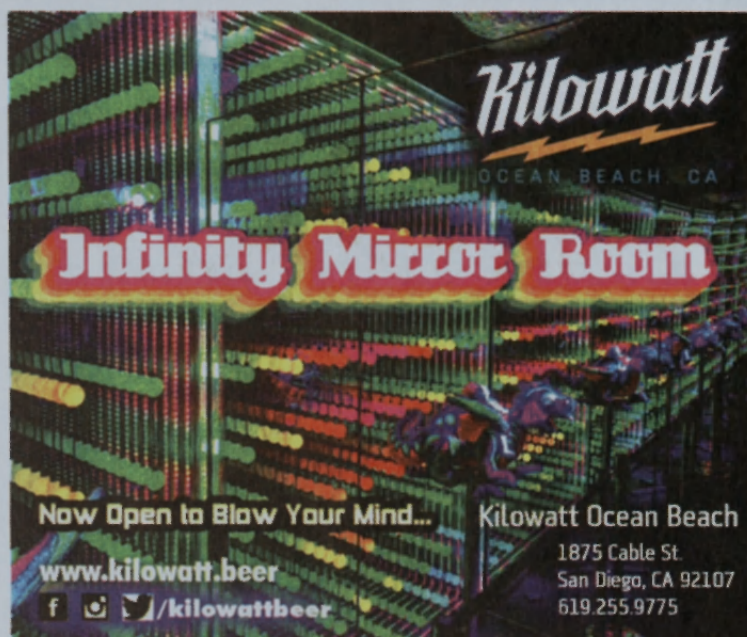
- ▷ Phunky Matters @ Ebullition Brew Works

January 25 - Saturday

- ▷ 4th Anniversary Party @ Pure Project Miramar

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THE *Next* Generation: HOLLY DONER

BY BETH DEMMON

The AleSmith cellarperson talks about being new to the local brew scene and dreams for the future.

Considering the most current iteration of San Diego's craft beer industry dates back to the early 1990s, it's easy to inadvertently (or purposefully) gloss over those still relatively new to it. Millennials are touted as the biggest group of weekly craft beer drinkers in the United States—an age demographic skewing as young as 23 years old, according to the Pew Research Center.

That means of the approximately 6,500 beer-related jobs in San Diego alone, a decent chunk of them are occupied by employees barely over the legal drinking age, each one yet to obtain the professional longevity so often idolized by beer circles. That's not to say the accomplishments of early beer pioneers are anything less than monumental, which of course they are; simply that the newbies behind-the-scenes often toil in laborious, underappreciated positions equally essential to the success of any brewery.

A cellarperson is one of these semi-invisible positions. They're customarily overshadowed by the more recognizable role of brewer, who tend to be the first, and sometimes only, face of a brewery. But breweries who have the ability to hire a support staff that separates brewers from cellar duties give these production worker bees a big advantage—the possibility of upward mobility, along with the experience to execute virtually any job breweries of all sizes may require.

Holly Doner fits both of these criteria, as she's both new to San Diego beer and works as a cellarperson at AleSmith Brewing Company, a position she's held only for a few months. Her path to production didn't initially come from a place of passion for the product; rather, it unfurled as a better career option as opposed to her original plan, which was to become a veterinarian. It was during her enrollment in the animal science program at the University of California, Davis where Doner first heard about the Master Brewers Certificate Program.



"I was like, well, maybe I'll try one of the classes and see if I like it," says Doner. "I totally fell in love with it." She ultimately ended up graduating from UC Davis with her animal science degree, but "had beer in the back of my mind the whole time I was up there."

It wasn't until she moved to San Diego in 2017 that she realized opportunities in the craft beer scene far outweighed the possibilities of utilizing her degree. With the myriad of beer-related educational courses available at schools like SDSU, UCSD, and more, Doner decided to pursue beer instead. "I just didn't have the heart for [vet school]," she explains. "There's a ton of room to grow [in beer]." (It's a testament to craft beer's growth that it's now considered a stable profession as opposed to glorified labor of love.)

Doner enrolled in the UCSD Extension brewing certificate program, where she soaked in beer basics and local history with professors that included Chris White (president, founder, and CEO of White Labs, Inc.) and Yuseff Cherney (head distiller/co-founder of Cutwater Spirits and formerly of Ballast Point). It was there that she first heard about the opening at AleSmith.

"This was the first beer place that I applied to, so I wasn't really expecting anything. And I ended up getting my job," she says. "It's been a crazy learning curve, especially at such a big facility." Doner admits



joining such a large-scale, as well as well-regarded, brewing operation so early in her career caused her some stress. But she's quick to applaud her co-workers for an intrinsic willingness to share knowledge with a relative rookie.

Doner's days as a cellarperson range from fairly strenuous ("It's very hard, physical work—I definitely underestimated that going in!") to somewhat monotonous ("Cleaning... a lot of cleaning," she chuckles), but the variety has allowed her to cultivate a surplus of skills she hopes will one day help her achieve a new goal: owning her own brewery.

In the meantime, Doner hopes to see more women getting into the production side of beer. "I'm definitely the only one in the production area working with a bunch of guys, which I don't mind... but it would be nice to have more girls in the cellar." She provides some words of encouragement for women hesitant to break in.

"Stay dedicated and don't get discouraged, because it is a lot of hard work at first and it is nerve-racking. Stay focused, work hard, and it'll work out." ✨

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Mind Your Biscuits

*A holiday gift straight from my heart—
and the heart of the south—to all of you!*

BY BRANDON HERNÁNDEZ



Per traditional wintertime lyrics, it's the most wonderful time of the year. A lifelong yuletide fan...nay, fanatic...I am happier than Buddy the Elf high on candy spaghetti that the holiday season is upon us. I love the fact that, for a few weeks people have plenty of reasons to get together with family and friends, allow for extra merriment and generally enjoy life to a greater degree. Of course, there's also presents. As a youngster, I loved getting gifts, but the older I got, the more that act of *giving* them took precedence for me. So, come December I like to use this column to share a recipe as my gift to those of you who are kind enough to read what I write. You definitely deserve something for doing that!

This year, I'm stuffing that mantle-secured stocking (or oven mitt) with one of my favorite recipes: cheese biscuits. It took me several years to refine my recipe and technique, but I'm proud to say that I now rival a Southern grandmother when it comes to baking these babies up. The key is to pay attention to little things along the way. Let's tackle some of those, shall we?

The first thing anyone will tell you when talking about how to make fluffy biscuits is to employ a soft touch. It's true that overworking dough compresses everything and can result in baked goods fit for double duty as doorstops, but there is a point where you really want to get in there and take out your aggressions: the dry-ingredient stage. Everything you do here sets up all that your biscuits will become.

Start by sifting your ingredients. You don't want clumps of baking soda or any odd solids making their way into the dough. At that point, you can add cheese. When grating it, use the grater with the smallest holes so you get the finest grate. This will help you to most easily and evenly blend the cheese into the dough. You'll tackle that as soon as you add in your cubed, cold butter. Don't overlook that second adjective. You want your butter to be as cold as possible. For one thing, it will help you to cut

it into cubes. Secondly, it will help it hold up as you use your hands to grind all the ingredients together into a coarse mixture where the butter is flaked into pieces that look like snow-dusted Rice Krispies.

Now it's time to add your milk. Many swear by buttermilk, and I love using it, but I find that it can overshadow the flavor of the cheese or, if you're using a tangy cheese, take things too far in the acidic direction. Regardless of what you choose, the rules are the same. Pour it in and then, using one hand (to keep the other dry and clean), use the least amount of force to mix everything into a single, semi-loose mass that stays together just enough so you can transfer the dough to a lightly floured surface. Once there, you'll keep on your kid gloves and mold it into an inch-thick rectangle that you'll gingerly wrap in plastic and refrigerate for half an hour. If you don't refrigerate it, the butter in the dough will melt too fast in the oven, ruining everything.

Everybody likes their biscuits golden-brown. The best way to achieve this is by brushing the tops of them with melted butter before placing them in the oven. I'm a proponent of this, but certain cheeses (such as Cheddar) will brown on their own, eliminating the need for this step. Cheese also imparts different levels of salinity based on the type you're using. If you're using a lower-sodium variety, feel free to sprinkle a little fleur de sel (sea salt) atop the biscuits before baking them.

Going back to the fromage, I prefer to incorporate different cheeses depending on what I'm serving my biscuits with. For breakfast, I like Cheddar, the sharper the better. For chili or stew, I like to use Asiago cheese. But when I'm indulging on the biscuits all by their lonesome, I go for the strongest, funkier blue cheese I can find. Stilton works well, as do American versions like Maytag and Point Reyes. Spanish Cabrales is my favorite, but very hard to find. Just avoid harder, crumblier blue cheese, as creamier varieties are better suited for this application.

Any blue cheese makes these biscuits a perfect match for the boozy, caramel character of rich barley wines. If ever there were a season for such boozy behemoths, winter is it.

I also enjoy adding some fresh rosemary sometimes. It really perks things up and, bonus, ups the biscuits' compatibility with IPAs, other hoppy beers, and American (i.e. hoppiers) takes on strong ales and barley wines. But it's not necessary and you needn't be relegated to that single herb. Oregano, thyme, basil, dill or tarragon all work well depending on what you'll enjoy alongside the biscuits.

Long story short, follow the rules...then do whatever you want. What I'm providing are the basics; what works for me. But like any recipe, this exists for you to adjust so that you will be happy with the end results. That's what this joyous season is all about: happiness. And I hope this provides you and yours a little bit of that. Happy holidays!

Cheese Biscuits

Yield: 16 biscuits

- 2 cups all-purpose flour, plus ¼ cup
- 1 Tbsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp white pepper
- ½ cup blue cheese crumbles (or finely grated cheese of your choosing)
- ½ Tbsp rosemary, finely chopped (optional)
- 1½ cup unsalted butter, cubed and kept cold
- 1 cup milk (or buttermilk)
- unsalted butter, melted (optional)
- fleur de sel (optional)

Evenly sprinkle ¼ cup of the flour onto a cutting board or Silpat. In a mixing bowl, sift together the remaining flour, baking powder, salt and pepper. Add the cheese, rosemary and cubed butter, and use your fingers to mash the ingredients together until a coarse mixture is formed. The butter should resemble small granules of rice. Add the milk and gently fold the mixture together just enough so that it can be turned out onto the floured surface. As gingerly as possible, form the dough into an inch-thick rectangle. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

Remove the dough from the refrigerator, unwrap and place on a flat surface. Use a 2-inch round biscuit-cutter to cut out as many rounds of dough as possible from the rectangle. As gently as possible, form the remaining dough into a square and cut out as many rounds as possible. Place the remaining dough into the biscuit-cutter to form it into a biscuit shape. Place the biscuits on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Brush the tops of the biscuits with melted butter and sprinkle with fleur de sel. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes or until golden-browned. Remove from oven and serve immediately.



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Oktoberfest:

BY IAN CHEESMAN

THE SCHOOL OF HARD KNACKWURST

In the pantheon of things that people once celebrated about professional boxer Mike Tyson, his gift for oratory was seldom among them. During his prime, most of his statements to the media revolved around predictable promises of savagery in a forthcoming bout or the intent to consume an opponent's children. These were memorable utterances in their own way, but a hair shy of profound. However, he also introduced the world to one of my favorite declarations: "Everybody has a plan till they get punched in the mouth."

The thesis here is straightforward. Even the most fully conceptualized fight strategy has the potential to implode when a rogue jab injects some cold reality into it. Still, I believe there's a deeper wisdom to extract

from it. It speaks to the folly of expecting the world to bend to your agenda. It proposes that grace during trying moments can be as valuable as the plan to navigate them. It also reminds that you should avoid being punched in the mouth, which is unquestionably solid advice.

Two months ago, I wrote an article about "training" for Oktoberfest in Munich by proxy of familiarizing myself with Burning Beard Brewing's take on Old World beers. I was being cheeky, sure, but on some level I truly believed that recalibrating my palate was all the preparation I needed to most fully enjoy the festival. It wasn't until my wife needed to forcibly steer me by the lederhosen away from the tents to the hotel for a 5 p.m. bedtime that I discovered Oktoberfest punched me in the mouth.

It was then that I realized that you, gentle readership, deserved more than my half-baked theories on preparing for Oktoberfest. Here are the many lessons I gleaned from my experience.

Lesson #1 - Oktoberfest is a Gauntlet

I am veteran drinker. That's not a brag on my liver's durability so much as to say I can typically thread the needle of maintaining an enjoyable buzz without getting particularly sloppy. Suffice to say, Oktoberfest ruined that streak.

There are a good many variables I manage in the course of a session (pacing, hydration, intended exit time, calorie intake, et cetera) that inform decisions throughout. I didn't appreciate that Oktoberfest would be just unfamiliar enough to throw a series of tiny monkey wrenches into that elaborate machinery.





The first clogged cog I experienced was the pressure of acquiring space in a festival tent. Unless you're traveling with a group large enough to justify the considerable coin to reserve a table, clusters of seats can be tricky to come by. An easy solution to that is to hit the grounds early and secure a spot. It's so logical and simple that you might not even balk at arriving when the gates open at 10 a.m. and grabbing your first stein shortly thereafter. That's by no means too early for a beer in my book, but it's the sort of game plan that easily sets a course towards oblivion if one isn't mindful of it.

Once seated, the festival tents have you live life by the liter, an unfamiliar volume for metric-phobic sorts like Americans. Granted, the conversion math of roughly two pints per stein isn't that confounding, but festbiers drink so light and refreshing that it's trivial to fly through them quickly and lose count in the process. The encounter also serves up innumerable opportunities to toast your compatriots or participate in drinking songs, causing stein contents to inevitably whittle away. Compound all that with the expectation that an empty glass signals your seat will be rendered the same shortly thereafter and there's always an external pressure to grab just one more.

I ordinarily consume water in equal measure to my beer intake. It's a drag, sure, but it's a simple compensation to prevent a crusty morning-after and slow the onboarding of additional alcohol. Oktoberfest doesn't make this easy. Water is never free and tends to arrive in much smaller volumes relative to the beer. Even if you have the wherewithal to order it, you'll have to endure the incredulous looks from your server who will inevitably hydration-shame you with something akin to "But that's what the beer is for!"

Long story short, eat early, get loads of water for the table, checkpoint with friends often, and don't let the sometimes dizzying celebration break your marathon pace.

Lesson #2 - Lederhosen Want You To Pee Your Pants

Unless you are a resident of Bavaria, odds are you wear lederhosen as often as, well, any other leather breeches. The first time you don them, their historical roots as a durable outerwear for physical labor become very apparent—they are pretty darn stiff.

Even if you take the time to hike around and season your new breeches a bit before Oktoberfest (and "season" is definitely the right word here, given how poorly leather breathes), you probably won't put much thought into exercising its most important feature: the drop-front flap. The quasi-codpiece is far more convenient than entirely disrobing to use restroom facilities, but it doesn't quite rate as user-friendly. When multiple liters of festbier are signaling their desire for a hasty egress, those five buttons are no more yielding than the rest of the lederhosen. Pair that with the reduced dexterity that accompanies said beverage and you have the perfect storm for a Category 5 Oopsie. I strongly suggest you practice beforehand and loosen those notches up.

Lesson #3 - The Customer Isn't Always Right

If there's one word to describe my experience with German hospitality workers, it would be "brisk." That's even a little charitable, at least

against an American service industry context where smiles, check-ins, and accommodations abound. I'll go ahead and tell you now, no, you can't get a side salad with that instead, Karen.

In fairness, there is little time for niceties when you're keeping the motor of Oktoberfest running. The appetites for beer and food are voracious in the Weisen tents and there's no shortage of hustle needed. However, that tends to manifest in an attitude that you are beholden to their level of efficiency as well. Failing to have your order ready on their timetable is bound to elicit some very withering looks.

This sentiment wasn't entirely confined to the festival grounds either. One of my favorite moments from the trip was when my request for a rauchbier at a local restaurant was met with a brief moment of consideration, followed by a "No." I paused, assuming some justification would follow, but her stoic look was unwavering. Perhaps sensing my confusion, she followed with "It's too smoky. Here, you have this one" while gesturing to the Augustiner helles. Now I knew full well what I was ordering, but I was so jarred by the forcefulness of her decision that I couldn't muster the will to disagree. I submissively sipped on my pale lager, hopeful that she'd notice what a good, compliant customer I was and reconsider indulging me on the next round.

All of this is to say that there's some truth to the cultural trope of a German embrace of efficiency, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. They appreciate it and, in turn, strive to deliver it. In the chaos of Oktoberfest you'll welcome that effort. I realized in hindsight that Proscriptive Waitress was most likely preventing a common beer-rookie pitfall and was kind enough to do it in a non-native tongue, even if it landed poorly. And yes, I did get the rauchbier for the next round with no hassle.

On a related note, these folks absolutely deserve your gratuities and, unlike what you've probably heard, tipping is very much a thing in



Germany. Further, like everything else in their dining experience, there are unspoken rules to abide by. When presented with a bill, the expectation is that you'll hand them cash and declare how much change you desire back after you've accounted for tip. A typical tip is about 10% of the tab. Failure to do so up front can signal your lack of intent to tip, which means they almost certainly are not going to allow you to have the beer you want next time, even if you are as well-behaved as I was.

Lesson #4 - Don't Doubt the Kraut

Traditional Bavarian food has always looked amazing to me. I was consumed with the idea of having crispy pork knuckle and snowball-sized dumplings swimming in dunkel gravy. The fact that it did not disappoint in the slightest when I finally got it was even more amazing. Next to all that savory majesty, the neighboring grayish heap of sauerkraut they served with it looked like a sad afterthought. I promise you, it is anything but.

First off, it was legitimately tasty. Its notable lactic bite really cut through the rich fattiness of, well, everything else, and served as a robust palate cleanser. However, there is a more important reason to indulge. Vegetables make precious few appearances in the cuisine around Oktoberfest. Sauerkraut represents your most reliable source of dietary fiber. The fact that it is also supercharged dose of probiotics means that it is one-stop-shopping for your gut-health needs. If you are not a fan of the stuff, I seriously recommend cultivating a taste for it before you arrive.





Lesson #5 - Uniformity is the Spice of Life

Remember all those lessons ago when I mentioned preparing for Oktoberfest by recalibrating my palate with a variety of Old World styles? Not only did it not help, but it actually managed to de-prepare me in the process. That's a level of failure you almost have to be proud of.

The truth is I was weak. After thoroughly enjoying Burning Beard Brewing's festbier and hefeweizen, I felt a familiar itch taking hold of me. I was getting bored with subtlety and nuance. I craved something new, a more bombastic and novel selection. I dove headlong into dinkelweisses and roggenbiers and kölschs to mix things up. It was an absolute delight and 0% reflective of my imminent experience.

When you're in the Weisn, you drink festbier. A lot of it. When you venture out into Munich, you will see the odd dunkel about, but it's mostly helles lager and hefeweizen. Choosing between Augustiner-Bräu's and Weihenstephaner's take on the same is about as dynamic as it gets.

The "well, duh"-tier realization here was that my instinctual pursuit of variety was completely at odds with my surroundings. My heart wanted to embrace the new drinking culture, but my id was not along for the ride. Hell, I've blown through a Sierra Nevada Celebration and a bourbon-barrel aged stout just trying to mow my way through this section. It's a sickness.

The simple fact is a trip to Munich is best regarded as a reset to your palate and your proclivities. Beer are not Pokémon to collect here -- they are an essential, reliable part of the culinary and social fabric. Embrace that there's nothing to chase, savor the delicate flavor, and a third thing that rhymes too.

Despite the minor snags in my experience, I wouldn't have traded it for the world. I got a chance to see Bavaria at peak Bavarian-ness. I drank enough lager to officially graduate from a Crispy Boi to a Crispy Man. In the end I took a few cultural sucker punches and still managed to move forward. I'd like to think Mike Tyson would be proud of that.



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If we're being totally honest, the modern craft distillery consumer experience is kind of a joke. Courtesy of the stringent Type-74 Craft Distillers License, tasting rooms are limited to serving 1.5 ounces of alcohol per person, per day. This represents one standard cocktail, a few miniscule splashes, or the garnish whiskey that chases the other 8 ounces I've already put in my Irish coffee. It basically tastes like pour-over made with gasoline, but there's no denying it will wake you up, albeit temporarily. But I digress.

The only salvation from this rule is the allowance for "private events", which waives the limitation.

In those glorious circumstances, such as the San Diego Distillers Fest, you are untethered to enjoy an endless array of finely crafted distillations.

The freedom is almost as intoxicating as the beverages themselves. Almost.

This festival from the San Diego Distillers Guild, an alliance founded in 2014 to promote local spirits, featured 20 craft distillers, live music, and multiple hors d'oeuvres stations. It also provided about two pallets of bottled water, a move that reminded this may be the guild's debut fest, but it was by no means their first rodeo.

My first impression upon entering the festival was that it felt like a scale model of the beer fests I'm more accustomed to. This was a far more concentrated (or dare I say...distilled) experience. In that frame of reference it initially felt underwhelming, but that was because I didn't appreciate how it would unfold. Each station offered anywhere between 2 and 10 different spirit or cocktail samples, a density that encouraged you to set up camp momentarily, engage with the distiller, and really learn about what you were tasting. It was a far more personal and intimate festival, which was a nice change of pace. And far be it from me to complain about pairing less walking with more alcohol.

Most of the neat spirits were served in the sort of cups you'd typically dose your cold medicine with. It wasn't the most satisfying way to experience them, but obviously that was a necessary evil if you hoped to drink your way through the fest. On the bright side, they made the small plate appetizers look massive.

Fun with forced perspective aside, the food samples were a delightful accompaniment to the occasion and welcomed buffer for all the incoming ethanol. My favorite pairing of the evening were the You & Yours Distilling Co. buttermilk biscuits. They were thoughtfully appointed with charred scallion butter and a gin-kissed mixed berry jam. Not only did it pair wonderfully with Into The Woods (a cocktail marrying London Dry Gin, rosemary simple syrup, lemon juice, Topo Chico, and maple spray), it introduced me to an entirely new gin-delivery system. No jam will be safe again if my liquor cabinet has anything to say about it.





In the sparse moments between wolfing down buttermilk biscuits, I also managed to try a good many spirits worth highlighting. If you are a fan of subtlety (which you can probably gather by the tone of this article I typically am not), the newly released Jasmine Tea Rum from Seven Caves Spirits is quite intriguing. It exists in a bizarre Netherworld between gin and rum, where the delicate floral character of jasmine is elevated by a subtle cane sugar sweetness. The spirit has the merest tannic nip to it, like a tea that was steeped about 15 nanoseconds too long, which is sufficient to add a bit of additional character to it.

Copper Collar Distillery likewise brought a novel infusion to the table with their limited release of star anise-flavored vodka. The star anise flowers express a potent, candied licorice flavor despite the fact there is no back-sweetening on this spirit. Think of it as sambuca's less braggadocious cousin. It is the rare vodka that would also serve as a digestif, which is pretty cool.


One of the most unusual and notable samples of the night hailed from 117° West Spirits. Cherya is a spirit distilled from malted barley, cherrywood smoked malt, crystal malt, and rye, which is "vapor-infused" with opal and mosaic hops and aged in charred American oak barrels. It obviously reminds of the "craft beer whiskey" that San Diego

Distillery has become recognized for, but the approach of exposing the hops to distilling vapors expresses a note that is more botanical and aromatic than bitter. It had a pleasant honeysuckle note that played well with the soft floral and earthy elements of the hops.

Another ancillary benefit of these festivals is the ability to reconnect with industry folks who I've been too oblivious to contact since I'd last written about them. I usually just assume that once my words have met the public eye that their path to superstardom is paved and they're too busy swimming in their cash pools to chat. Thankfully, Misadventure Vodka spared me a few moments to share the recent migration to their own distillery and public tasting room. For reasons already detailed above, the new Vista location is best experienced by booking a tour experience on their website (misadventure.co) or contacting them to host a private event. If the rest of their cocktail program is as fantastic as their signature vodka tonic, it shouldn't be missed.

While the current understanding of the Space-Time continuum negates the ability of most people from sharing in the 2019 San Diego Distillers Fest, I hope the recollections from this event have spurred your interest in seeking out one of the many local craft distilleries that the guild represents. San Diego is putting their creative (and often delicious) stamp on the industry and it's worth bearing witness to. ☼

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We'll pick 20 from the hat and publish the results in our next issue.



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