



What's Brewing on California's Central Coast

By Leslie Patino, May 24, 2016

Craft beer enthusiasts in the Monterey/Santa Cruz area of California's Central Coast have a lot to look forward to in the coming months.

Peter B's at Monterey's Portola Hotel, which has been without a head brewer since Kevin Clark left in March for a position in Minnesota, will welcome Justin Rivard aboard the first week of June. He comes from Michigan where he most recently worked at Arbor Brewing Company. Several blocks away, J.C. Hill and his crew at Alvarado Street Brewery and Grill are going great guns. In April, they opened a gorgeous beer garden in what was formerly a small parking lot surrounded by the concrete backsides of Alvarado businesses. Last Friday, they threw a sold-out grand opening party at their brand new production brewery over in Spreckels. The brewery's taproom opens to the public today, Tuesday, May 24.

Meanwhile, the craft scene in and around Santa Cruz is on fire these days with some 15 craft breweries, including several in the works. For the last year, locals have been enjoying brews from two strong newcomers: New Bohemia Brewing Company, specializing in some great European-style lagers and West Coast ales, and Corralitos Brewing Company, 20 minutes away in—where else?—Corralitos.

Craft beer fans and the newest breweries on the block were out in force last Thursday evening at Verve Coffee Roasters for Event Santa Cruz Brew: Part II. It was an evening of local pride and products with pizza from Woodstock Pizza and hot dogs from Sun's Out Buns Out gourmet hot dog cart. JBQAV provided music and audio. In the beer line, I met Elizabeth Hodges, who makes and sales natural skincare products through her website, The Verdant Pantry. Then, we met Abhijit Bhelände, who summed up the vibe saying, "I love that Santa Cruz is one of the strongholds of community development and Event Santa Cruz seems to promote that spirit." Beer in hand, I asked a guy wearing a Discretion hat if he worked there. Charles Bradley, who introduced himself and his business, Axiom Commercial Furniture, said he frequents all of Santa Cruz's breweries, particularly Discretion and New Bohemia.

Humble Sea Brewing Company (slogan: Experiments in Beer) poured several brews, including two collaborations with Verve, Jitter Me Timbers, a coffee breakfast stout, and My Morning Speedo, a coffee saison. The three owners/friends, who all have day jobs, somehow find the time to brew on a tiny system in Ben Lomond, up in the Santa Cruz Mountains. They plan on a late summer opening for their Santa Cruz brewery.

Buddies Nathan Van Zandt and Brandon Padilla of Shanty Shack Brewing talked up the Verve crowd about the fall opening of their brewery, to be located at 138 Fern Street. These homebrewers-turning-pro already bottle and deliver their brews to some 30 wholesale accounts. They've got a cool website where you can sign on to invest in Shanty Shack, buy merch or read poems about their brews. [Click here](#) to read a literary description of Enlightenment, their saison brewed with grapefruit zest and lavender.

East Cliff Brewing Company—located where else?—on East Cliff Drive, opened three months ago. Jon Moriconi told how he and partner James Hrica decided to fill a local void in the English-style ale category. Michael Enos, of nanobrewery Elkhorn Slough Brewing Company (slogan: May the funk be with you), in nearby Watsonville, riffed on aliens, brewing beer with yeast harvested from homegrown apples and getting his brews out there at places like Beer Thirty.

No post on the Santa Cruz beer scene would be complete without mentioning Annie Pautsch, owner of Brew Cruz. She runs popular public and private brewery tours on Betty Jane, a funky bus that I'm pretty sure is a lot older than Pautsch.

At the Verve event, Pautsch, who's bubblier than champagne, did a brisk business taking free "passport" photos of everybody she could snag. It was a cute hook to get people to check out the \$25 Santa Cruz Beer Trail passports created by Pautsch and Bryce Root from Root Group Marketing. Fresh off the presses, the "First Release" passport is valid May 16 through September 30 and offers plenty of good deals at 10 area breweries and tap houses. I give the passport a big thumbs-up for craft fans in the Santa Cruz area.